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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to summarize and evaluate the Alameda County, California library system's two years of operation under a no-fines policy and a centralized overdues facility, leading to recommendations for future action. The objectives of the study are to: (1) present an historical summary of the changes in the library policies and procedures regarding fines and overdue materials, along with the reasoning that led to those changes; (2) assess the effects of the new policies and procedures on library operations, including costs, circulation of materials, and relationships with patrons; and (3) evaluate suggested changes in those policies and procedures, including the possible reinstatement of the former policy on fines, and to develop recommendations for future action. After discussing the various purposes for which libraries have instituted fines, and the arguments that have been offered for abolishing them, the major portion of the report deals with the actual effects of operating under a no-fines policy, in six categories: use of the library, the library's collection, the library's clientele, fairness to patrons, the library's image and role, and the costs of library operation. (Author)

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TWO FINELESS YEARS

A History, Analysis, and Evaluation

prepared for

The Alameda County Library System

Hayward, California

by

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LI 004 141

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.	
A. Purposes and objectives of the study.	1
B. Historical background summary.	1
C. Methods used in the study.	2
D. The experience of other libraries.	3
II. CENTRALIZATION OF OVERDUES OPERATIONS.	
A. Methods prior to centralizing overdues.	4
B. Establishing the Central Overdues Unit.	5
C. Central Overdues operations.	6
D. Variations for special materials.	7
E. Future plans for Central Overdues.	8
F. Evaluation of centralized overdues.	9
III. THE ELIMINATION OF FINES FOR OVERDUES.	
A. The purposes of fines.	11
B. Reasons for abolishing fines.	12
C. The effects of abolishing fines.	14
1. Use of the library.	
a. Service to patrons.	14
b. Circulation.	16
c. Borrowing privileges.	17
2. The library's collection.	
a. Promptness of return.	19
b. Long-overdue books.	22
3. The library's clientele.	
a. Patron cooperation.	24
b. Disadvantaged patrons.	27
c. Children.	28
4. Fairness to patrons.	
a. Who should be fined.	31
b. Beating the system.	32
c. Variable enforcement.	34
5. The library's image and role.	
a. Relationships with patrons.	35
b. Borrower responsibility.	39
c. The free public library.	43
6. Costs of library operations.	
a. Collecting the revenue.	43
b. Manpower requirements.	46
c. Job classification level.	47
d. Work flow efficiency.	48
e. Supplies and postage costs.	49
f. Equipment and space costs.	50
g. Centralized overdues operations.	53
D. Possible reinstatement of fines.	53
E. Evaluation of the no-fines policy.	56
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.	
A. The Central Overdues Unit.	60
B. The no-fines policy.	60
C. General remarks.	60
APPENDIX: BIBLIOGRAPHY	61

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. Purpose and objectives of the study.

The purpose of this study is to summarize and evaluate the Alameda County Library System's two years of operation under a no-fines policy and a centralized overdues facility, leading to recommendations for future action.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To present an historical summary of the changes in the library policies and procedures regarding fines and overdue materials, along with the reasoning that led to those changes.

2. To assess the effects of the new policies and procedures on library operations, including costs, circulation of materials, and relationships with patrons.

3. To evaluate suggested changes in those policies and procedures, including the possible reinstatement of the former policy on fines, and to develop recommendations for future action.

B. Historical background summary.

Prior to June, 1970, the Alameda County Library System followed the general policy of most public libraries in assessing fines for overdue library materials. In March of that year, the practice was described as follows:

> The Alameda County Library System has, from its beginning, followed the policy of charging fines for library materials returned after the designated date due. These fines are now, for adult books, 5¢ per day overdue, up to a maximum of $1.50 per item; for children's books, 5¢ per day overdue to a maximum of $1.00 for all materials checked out at one time. If the fine for children's books is not paid within six weeks, it increases to $1.00 per book. (Ref. 59)

However, in the latter part of 1969, the staff became interested in reports in the professional literature of libraries that had successfully eliminated fines. Of special interest were the potential for reducing clerical manpower needs, which were continually growing as book circulation in the system increased, and the potential for improving relationships with the public. Following is a brief chronology of the documents and events that ensued:

Nov. 25, 1969: Memo sent to library staff by Dorothy Stake, then Coordinator of Adult Book Selection, announcing a study "to appraise the feasibility of abolishing fines." (Ref. 56)

December, 1969: Letters of inquiry were written by Dorothy Stake to libraries that had indicated in the professional literature that they had abolished fines, asking for an evaluation of their experience under the new policy.

January 6, 1970: Memo written by Dorothy Stake, "Proposal to think about abolishing fines," presenting estimates of manpower and salary savings that would result, and summarizing the responses received from the other libraries. (Ref. 57)

Jan. 14, 1970: The Alameda County Library Advisory Commission recommended "that the Board of Supervisors eliminate the Library's policy of charging fines as a means of reducing the library's clerical workload." (Ref. 59)

Feb. 18, 1970: A report, "Time study on fines," was written by Lois Lundquist, Information Programs Coordinator. (Ref. 58)

March 24, 1970: "Presentation for Reducing Workloads by Eliminating the Policy of Charging Fines for Overdue Library Materials," a 7-page proposal and cost analysis by Caroline Long, Administrative Assistant. (Ref. 59)

June, 1970: Alameda County Board of Supervisors approved the proposal to abolish fines for overdue materials.

August 1, 1970: Central Overdues Unit began operations, as recommended in the March 24th "Presentation" cited above.

A more complete listing of relevant internal documents of the Alameda County Library System is presented in the Appendix, as Refs. 56-74.

C. Methods used in the study.

A variety of methods were used to collect information for this study, as follows:

1. Staff members of the Alameda County Library were interviewed on various topics, and some of them prepared specially written summaries on specific items in the study outline. These staff members included Dorothy Stake (who also interviewed additional staff members for this study, Ref. 76), Caroline Long, Pamela Osborne and Anne Boyce (Ref. 74), Judy Klapproth (Ref. 73), and Judy Dorsey (Refs. 72 and 75).

2. A search of the professional literature on the subject of fines was conducted, going back through 1964, the earliest issues of Library Literature in the Professional Collection of the Alameda County Library. A few additional citations from earlier years were added as they were encountered in the reading. Genya Lyon was especially helpful in reviewing the citations for relevancy and obtaining copies of many of the articles from the Alameda County Library collections and from the University of California School of Librarianship Library in Berkeley. The author obtained several additional articles from the Contra Costa County Library in Pleasant Hill. The bibliography of cited items appears in the Appendix, as Refs. 1-47.

3. The internal files of the Alameda County Library's Headquarters Office were examined for useful material, especially a file on Fees & Fines that had been accumulated by Caroline Long in preparation for this study, to which additional material had been added by the author and other staff members. Included were the letters received by Dorothy Stake from other libraries (Refs. 48-53) and some newspaper clippings (Refs. 54-55). Selected internal documents are listed in the bibliography in the Appendix, as Refs. 56-74.

D. The experience of other libraries.

The search of the professional literature of the past ten years, plus a review of the correspondence with other libraries that was conducted by Dorothy Stake in late 1969, has produced a list of libraries that have abolished fines, categorized as follows:

1. Favorable results reported:

   a. American School, Sao Paulo, Brazil. (Ref. 22)
   b. Anoka County Library, Spring Lake Park, Minnesota. (Ref. 5)
   c. Coalinga District Library, Coalinga, California (Refs. 17 and 48)
   d. Dakota County Library System, West Saint Paul, Minn. (Ref. 49)
   e. Daniel Boone Regional Library, Columbia, Missouri (Ref. 50)
   f. Dedham Public Library, Dedham, Massachusetts. (Refs. 25 and 29)
   g. Douglas County Library, Roseburg, Oregon. (Refs. 51 and 55)
   h. Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Md. (Refs. 12, 13, 14, 19, 28, 35, 36, 37, and 52)
   i. Genesee County Libraries (incl. Flint Public Library System), Michigan. (Refs. 18, 23, 53)
   j. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Library, Troy, N.Y. (Ref. 27)
   k. Rowley Free Public Library, Rowley, Mass. (Ref. 44)
   l. Vigo County Library, Terre Haute, Indiana. (Refs. 11 and 21)
   m. Windsor Public Library, Ontario, Canada. (Ref. 32)

2. Unfavorable results reported:

   a. Morrisson-Reeves Public Library, Richmond, Ind. (Refs. 15, 26, 28, 30)
   b. Pennsylvania State Library, Harrisburg, Penna. (Ref. 39)
   c. Virginia Beach Public Library, Virginia Beach, Va. (Ref. 9)

3. Results unreported:

   a. Andover Public Library, Andover, Mass. (Ref. 1)
   b. Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, N.Y. (Ref. 20)
   c. Fort Vancouver and Spokane County Libraries, Washington. (Ref. 43)
   d. St. Louis Public Library, St. Louis, Missouri. (Ref. 16)
   e. Wandsworth Library, England. (Ref. 45)
   f. Waterbury Public Library, Waterbury, Conn. (Ref. 8)

4. Results of "Amnesty Days" reported:

   a. Chicago Public Library, Chicago, Illinois. (Refs. 6 and 7)
   b. Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland. (Ref. 31)
   c. St. Louis Public Library, St. Louis, Missouri. (Ref. 2)
   d. Westchester County Libraries, New York. (Ref. 6)

II. CENTRALIZATION OF OVERDUES PROCEDURES

A. Methods used prior to the establishment of the Central Overdues Unit. (Ref.74)

Before a centralized overdues unit had been established, each branch library was responsible for keeping its own circulation and overdue records.

Circulation records were first kept by use of Recordak filmers and Key-Sort cards. This process involved pre alpha-coded and numbered transaction cards that were hand date-stamped and then filmed with the book card and patron's card. As books were returned, the Key-Sort card was pulled from the pocket of the returned material and later sorted by means of a pick tool. (Key-Sort cards were punched according to the number and alpha-code printed on them and were sorted manually, much the same as if it were being done by machine.) When books were approximately two weeks overdue, those transaction cards representing the appropriate due dates were read for missing numbers.

Preparation of overdues was a clerical responsibility in each branch, including the Bookmobile. Weekly (larger branches more often), the clerk would read film for the Key-Sort cards not returned from circulation, and from the information on the film, would type a multi-copy overdue notice.

The larger branches were each assigned a Recordak Reader for this purpose; the smaller branches usually shared one. (e.g., Newark's reader was also used by Union City and Niles as well.)

Later (approximately the middle of 1968), this system was discarded in favor of the Regiscope/T-Slip operation. The primary reason for this change was the storage factor for the Key-Sort cards. Each branch used the same Key-Sort cards continually, and they had to be stored in card bins and kept in the branch. Missing or damaged cards had to be replaced, frequently.

The Regiscope/T-Slip operation proved to have its disadvantages also. The biggest drawback was the fact that each T-slip returned to the branch had to be "marked-off" on a Mark-Off sheet. This was very time-consuming and the error factor was extremely high. But the advantage was that the slip was used only once and then was discarded -- no storage problem.

As with the Key-Sort operation, film was read for those items two to three weeks overdue, as indicated by those numbers not crossed off the Mark-Off sheets.

The overdue forms in both systems were the same, a three-part 3x5 form ordered from Gaylord. The first copy of the form was the reminder; the second copy, the second notice; and the last copy was the permanent branch record. From the

branch record a final notice letter was prepared when books still remained out in circulation after the second notice. The messenger was sent out as the final step in retrieving overdue materials. If all steps had been taken with no response from the patron, the branch record (with fines and fees totaled) was then clipped to the patron's registration card. If the amount the patron owed to the library was $35.00 or more, his name was added to the EBC Delinquent List and his library privileges were cut off.

B. The establishment of the Central Overdues Unit.

Included in the proposal to eliminate fines was the recognition that the overdues operations could be centralized into one location, instead of continuing to be decentralized into each branch library. The centralization and the efficiencies it promised were made possible when the necessity for immediate access to circulation records was removed with the elimination of fines.

Central Overdues officially began operations August 1, 1970. There were, unfortunately, a number of factors that contributed to the starting off of the Central Overdues Unit with severe handicaps:

1. The total work load to be centralized was somewhat underestimated, despite the time studies that were performed in the branch libraries during late 1969 and early 1970. (Refs. 56, 58) This underestimation may have been caused by the limited time available for the study, or it may also have been due to the "spotlight effect," the usual and unintentional tendency of workers to perform faster when they are being timed in an experiment. The result of underestimating the manpower requirements was that the Central Overdues Unit was understaffed from its very beginning. After the first nine months of operation, it was reported that "the staff whole-heartedly agrees that our main problem is under-staffing." (Ref. 64)

2. There were unforeseen delays in the receipt of equipment and supplies for the newly centralized operation. This factor in turn delayed the moment when Central Overdues could begin operating properly, thereby creating backlogs in the work schedules from the very beginning.

3. Central Overdues inherited backlogs from a number of branch libraries that had been thought to be caught up in their work. Whether this situation resulted from the reluctance of branch libraries to reveal their backlogs, or from inadequate staffing in the branches, or from delays in getting the Central Overdues Unit started on schedule, the effect was to give Central Overdues sizeable unanticipated backlogs at its beginning which were not of its own making.

4. Because of space limitations at the Winton Avenue building, the Cent-

ral Overdues operation was (and continues to be) housed in a Modulux building in Union City, despite the fact that the Central Overdues supervisors were located in the Winton Avenue building in Hayward, at Library Headquarters. This undesirably remote supervision of a new operation naturally resulted in inefficiencies that were not the fault of the staff, but which were due to the limited amount of on-the-spot observation, policy-making, procedure-improvements, etc., that could be achieved via part-time visits of headquarters supervisory personnel to the Union City location. A report of a visit to the Central Overdues office in May, 1971, by its supervisor concludes with the following paragraph:

> I am glad I spent the whole day. Many questions came up during the course of the day and may have been forgotten if I just had a meeting with them. I am going to set aside one morning each week to spend there to answer questions, review progress, etc. I feel a lot was accomplished by my being there. (Ref. 63)

C. Central Overdues operations. (Ref. 74)

Lacking the new forms and equipment, the Central Overdues staff began work on the backlog of final notice letters in August, 1970. Around October, two months after Central Overdues had been in operation, the equipment and new overdue forms arrived and the branches were told that their circulation transaction slips could now be sent to Central Overdues for processing.

The original method of handling T-slips at Central Overdues was to keep them interfiled numerically until approximately 1,000 were accumulated, the block of numbers covered by each Mark-Off sheet. Then the pack was read for missing numbers. This proved to be unsatisfactory because of the storage space and clerical time that were required for the retention and constant interfiling of the slips. It was then decided to handle them as the branches had, crossing off the numbers on the Mark-Off sheet as the slips were received at Central Overdues. Even employing this system, the number of T-slips being received at Central Overdues was overwhelming and continued to grow as circulation increased.

The new overdue forms were designed to be used as postal cards, to save the postage and handling that were required by the window envelopes formerly used. Second notices were eliminated, and in their place the final notice letter (now called a bill) was sent. Since a multi-copy form was no longer in use, it was often necessary to read the film again after the reminder notice was sent, to type up a bill form for those items that still had not returned from circulation. The reasoning behind discontinuing the multi-copy form was that (a) the second notice had been found by many libraries to be relatively ineffective in getting overdue books returned (Refs. 4, 40, 42, 47), and (b) it became less important after the

discontinuance of fines, which previously would have been mounting higher every day the book was out. However, the extra step of having to re-read the film to type the final letters helped put the Central Overdues operation further behind schedule.

This procedure was continued until November, 1971, when a multi-copy form was re-introduced. This did help to free clerical time spent on re-reading film to type bills, but the big problem was still the time-consuming function of crossing off T-slip numbers returned from circulation, particularly as circulation continued to grow.

Some drastic steps were taken to get the operation up-to-date. In August, 1971, Central Overdues was instructed to stop sending reminders for books that were due prior to July 1, 1971. The idea was to start on a current basis, which the Unit had never had the opportunity to do previously, catching up the older backlog items as time might permit. Even this action did not help, for in a short time the T-slips were again backlogged. This did serve to point out the main difficulty with the operation, however.

During this time the idea of replacing the T-slips by punched cards was being studied (Refs. 65, 66), and the new procedures went into effect in April, 1972. (Refs. 69, 71) By June of 1972, reminder notices were caught up (to one month after the due date), since no new T-slips were being received after April. With the punched-card and computerized system, it is believed that operations at Central Overdues will remain current as long as the Data Processing Department keeps up with the card sorting and the provision of print-outs of missing transaction numbers as they have agreed to do.

D. Variations for special materials. (Ref. 74)

In order to centralize all aspects of circulation control, a few special arrangements had to be made for non-book materials which do circulate in the branches, specifically paperbacks, posters and pamphlets.

To keep processing to a minimum and yet charge these materials out on film, a book card was used that stated "one paperback," etc., and the circulation was registered on film. These items were to be considered expendable.

Central Overdues was instructed not to send reminders on this type of material unless the patron also had cataloged material that was overdue. It was considered bad public relations to tell a patron he had something overdue but the library didn't know exactly what it was. If the patron did have cataloged over-

due materials, the Central Overdues staff would include any expendable items on the reminder notice.

Interlibrary loans was another area that required special methods for handling. In the past, interlibrary loans had always been hand-charged, but when overdues were centralized and branch staffs were cut, a way was needed to streamline the check-out procedure as well as to get the records on film so they could be handled by Central Overdues. In February of 1971 the filming of all interlibrary loan check-outs was begun.

Unfortunately, this system did not allow for the extra control that is needed on books that have been borrowed from other library systems. With Central Overdues behind in overdues, the reminder notices did not go out fast enough on interlibrary loans. In many instances, bills were being received for books that had been borrowed from other libraries before Central Overdues had even begun sending reminder notices for those books.

Therefore, the records for interlibrary loans borrowed from outside Alameda County were transferred to the Central Interlibrary Loan Unit in the Fremont Main branch library. (Refs. 68, 71) (Central Overdues continues to process overdue records on interlibrary loans borrowed and loaned within the Alameda County Library System.) This transfer has afforded the system the control of knowing what books have been borrowed from outside libraries and where they are in the system. Inadequate records and control on borrowed books could jeopardize interlibrary loan privileges with other libraries. Therefore, a transfer of this one aspect of the overdues operations had to be undertaken.

E. Plans for Central Overdues in the future.

Library Administration and the County Administrator's Office have both recently declared a policy that administrative back-up operations will receive greater financial and manpower support, in order to provide better services to patrons. The Alameda County Library Advisory Commission has also fully supported this policy. As of June 30, 1972, the following improvements in the Central Overdues operation were planned:

1. Staffing: The appointment of a full-time Clerk III supervisor of the Unit. This is intended to provide needed direction, an easier means for procedural improvements to be made, and liaison with the Data Processing Department.

2. Equipment: The replacement of the microfilm readers by reader-printers. This is intended to eliminate a great deal of the typing, proofreading, and error-prone operations of the present system.

3. Mechanization: The use of a specially-designed punched card as the circulation transaction card. (Ref. 69) This is intended to replace the tedious, time-consuming, and error-prone manual sorting of slips by branch personnel, and the mark-off operations by Central Overdues staff, by using computerized services from the Data Processing Department. (Ref. 71)

4. Organizational Transfer: The transfer of the Unit from the Library Materials Record Section (in the Technical Services Division) to the Business and Accounting Section (in the Administrative Services Division). This reorganization move is intended to place the Central Overdues Unit into closer proximity with operations of similar nature, particularly mechanization, financial record-keeping, and messenger service, all of which are handled by the Administrative Services Division.

5. Location: Moving the Central Overdues Unit from the Union City Modulux building into the Library Headquarters (Winton Avenue) building in Hayward. This move is intended to eliminate the afore-mentioned problems that have been created and perpetuated by the remoteness of the operation from Library Headquarters.

All of these plans are sound, well thought out, and highly desirable. They should be implemented as soon as possible. As discussed in the next section, improvements in basic back-up operations such as Central Overdues will achieve widespread benefits in improving the services rendered to patrons in every branch library in the system.

F. Evaluation of the centralized overdues operations.

The establishment of a centralized overdues facility by the Alameda County Library System appears to have been an excellent idea. It has reduced the clerical staffing in the branch libraries by centralizing these formerly decentralized tasks, and permits the branch libraries to concentrate more exclusively on direct services to the public. Despite a number of delays and inefficiencies that plagued the new operation, it has achieved the advantages that are usually associated with centralization: efficiency, closer control of the operation, an easier means for achieving improvements in the operation, a greater opportunity for mechanization, a greater degree of staff specialization and expertise that can be applied to the operation, more direct communication relating to the operation, more accurate budgeting, lower costs and better utilization of supplies and equipment, etc. These advantages will be further enhanced when the plans outlined in the preceding section are implemented.

These behind-the-scenes improvements and capabilities in turn have beneficial effects on the services that are provided to the library's patrons. For example, greater accuracy of the overdues operations results in a system that is fairer to everyone, and one which avoids the poor public relationships that accompany an error-prone system. Greater speed in processing overdue notices will result in improving the collection on the shelves (through more prompt return of books) and in reducing book losses (through faster notification and follow-up of overdue transactions). Replacing the T-slips by punched cards enabled modification improvements to be made in the charging machines at the branches, thereby removing a frequent source of patron discontent when the paper-feed mechanism of the charging machines would break down.

The Central Overdues operation is a good example to demonstrate the unity of purpose that exists between branch library operations and headquarters operations. They are equally essential partners in serving the library patron, differing only in their relative visibility to the patron.

The centralized overdues operation, and the benefits it achieves, would not be feasible without the accompanying elimination of fines for overdue materials. The proposal of March, 1970, to eliminate fines makes this point clearly:

> If the Library were to centralize overdues and retain fines, there would not be enough savings to warrant the change, primarily because fines would add urgency to the timing of all information to be transmitted between the center and the branches, and because the four overdue notices would have to be retained. There would also be added costs when the library staff duplicated files to assure immediate access to information in case of citizen complaint. (Ref. 59)

Early in 1972, the Alameda County Auditor-Controller's Office investigated the Central Overdues operation and commented as follows:

> From our examination of the procedures of the Central Overdues Office, it is our opinion that this operation generally is functioning in a satisfactory manner, especially considering the work load and also that it has only been in existence for the past 15 months. (Ref. 70)

III. THE ELIMINATION OF FINES FOR OVERDUE MATERIALS

A. The purposes of fines.

Prior to evaluating the wisdom of the decision to abolish fines for overdue materials, it is necessary to identify the various purposes for which fines are assessed by libraries. (Note: Only the fines that are assessed for overdue library materials are under consideration. All the libraries that were studied (including the Alameda County Library) continue to charge the borrower for books that are lost or damaged, and to revoke borrowing privileges of chronic offenders.)

The literature search revealed a number of objectives that fines for overdue materials are intended to accomplish. A composite list of the reasons for fines is as follows:

1. To serve as an incentive for the prompt return of borrowed materials, in order to make them available for other patrons. This is the most basic reason for instituting fines. The philosophy is that prompt return of materials is essential to serve the needs of the whole community most effectively, and that without the monetary incentive of fines, borrowers will be more selfish, negligent, and uncooperative in this regard. (Refs. 9, 15, 39, et al.)

2. To help protect the public property that is being loaned. The reasoning here is that the books have been purchased with public funds, and the librarian has a custodial responsibility to protect the property that has been entrusted to her care. (Ref. 15) In addition, since adequate public library funding is usually difficult to obtain, and book budgets must be carefully administered to make every dollar count, any device that promises to reduce book losses (and thus replacement costs) is thought to be desirable. (Ref. 42, et al.)

3. To serve as a penalty or punishment for those borrowers who do not abide by the rules. In fact, some jurisdictions refer to library fines as "penal fines" in their legislation. (Ref. 33) Technically, those who keep library materials beyond their due dates are guilty of misdemeanors. The feeling that transgressors should receive due punishment through the payment of fines is shared not only by many librarians and government officials, but also by many members of the public, some of whom insist on paying fines even in jurisdictions where fines have been abolished. (Ref. 15, et al.)

4. To serve to educate the borrowers, especially the younger ones, to a greater sense of responsibility for the rights of others, for public property, and for abiding by rules and regulations. There is a prevalent feeling that libraries, as both governmental and educational institutions, should stand for law and order and resist permissiveness by charging fines for overdues. This practice is felt

by many librarians and parents to be especially good training for children. (Ref. 34, et al.)

5. To serve as a source of income for the library. Although fines are admittedly a minor proportion of total library revenue, many librarians and government officials understandably feel that every dollar is important to their public library budgets. Also, many patrons are more willing to pay their fines when they realize that the money is going to help the library. (Ref. 15, et al) A number of libraries (including the Alameda County Library) become quite concerned, however, when they find that it is costing them more money to collect the fines than the amount of revenue that is produced by the fines.

The preceding paragraph underscores the necessity to keep the various objectives for having fines clearly distinguished from one another. For example, if a library charges fines primarily as an incentive to get its books returned more promptly, then the amount of the fine should be set with that objective in mind. But if the total revenue from fines is later compared with the cost of collecting the fines, that balance sheet is not directly relevant to the objective of prompt returns, no matter how the cost comparison comes out. A comparison of collection costs against replacement costs, for example, would be more meaningful. (Ref. 40)

As another example, if a library feels that fines are desirable as a penalty for failure to abide by the rules, or that fines instill a sense of responsibility in those who are fined, the reported greater willingness of the patron to pay the fine when he believes it is a contribution to the benefit of the library actually works against the punishment-responsibility objectives.

B. Reasons for abolishing fines.

As noted in Section I.D., a number of libraries have reported on their experiences with the policy of abolishing fines. A composite list of their reasons for eliminating fines for overdue books is as follows:

1. Improved use of the library.

a. Staff time formerly devoted to assessing, collecting, and accounting for fines can be used for improved service to patrons.

b. Circulation increases when the psychological barrier of fear of punishment for late returns is removed.

c. Many borrowers, including a large number of children, are once again enabled to use the library, through restoration of their previously-revoked borrowing privileges.

2. The library collection.

a. Fines have little or no effect on the promptness of return of library materials.

b. Many long-overdue or "lost" books are returned when the fear of a large fine has been removed. (This is one of the major reasons for having "Amnesty Days" in libraries that continue to charge fines.)

3. The nature of the library's clientele.

a. Most patrons are responsible and conscientious, with only a constant minority being uncooperative.

b. There should be greater recognition of the service needs of the disadvantaged members of the community, who can least afford to pay fines.

c. Children suffer unduly from fines and the loss of borrowing privileges, even though the fault may often not be theirs.

4. Fairness to patrons.

a. We should avoid penalizing those who are not chronic offenders, or who may be returning books late because of unusual circumstances, or who are innocent victims of errors.

b. Conscientious borrowers are charged fines at the circulation desk, while others have learned how to "beat the system" in various ways.

c. Inequalities are inevitably caused by variations in the strictness of enforcement among various staff members serving at the circulation desk. (In addition, the suspicion can arise that some staff members will not enforce the regulations as strictly for their personal friends as for other patrons.)

5. The library's image and role.

a. Greatly improved relationships with patrons result when a greater service orientation replaces the disciplinarian role.

b. Responsibility should be placed on the borrowers to return their books on time for the right reasons -- the needs of others -- rather than from the fear of penalties. (In addition, the borrowers should not be able to assuage their consciences for their late returns by "paying their way out" of their civic responsibilities.)

c. Fines are inconsistent with the concept of the "free public library."

6. Reduced costs of library operations.

a. The costs of collecting and accounting for the revenue received from fines are greater than the revenue itself.

b. Manpower reductions or reassignments are possible when fines are eliminated.

c. The classification level of staff members at the circulation desk can be reduced in a fine-free operation.

d. The work flow becomes smoother and more efficient when the necessity is removed for immediate examination of each book as it is being returned.

e. Fewer overdue notices are required in a fine-free operation, resulting in cost savings in supplies and postage as well as manpower.

f. A fine-free operation can produce reductions in the costs of equipment and space that would otherwise be needed, including typewriters, microfilm readers, catalog drawers for registration files, a quiet area in each branch for overdues work, etc.

g. Significant cost savings can be realized from the centralization of overdues operations when fines are eliminated.

By comparing this list of reasons for eliminating fines with the earlier list of purposes for instituting fines (Section III.A.), it is seen that each of the purposes or objectives of fines is disputed by those who are in favor of abolishing them. The subsequent sections of this report will examine the degree to which the various counter-claims have been realized in practice. For simplicity, the arrangement of topics will be the same as the above list.

C. The effects of abolishing fines.

1. Improved use of the library.

Perhaps the most readily justified reason for having fines for overdue materials is not in terms of punishment or property protection or responsibility training or library income, but in terms of improving the use of the library through the hoped-for prompt return of borrowed materials, in order that other patrons might have access to them. However, many libraries have found that a fine-free operation contains a number of compensating factors which themselves act to improve the use of the library, without the disadvantages that accompany a system of fines.

a. Staff time formerly devoted to assessing, collecting, and accounting for fines can be used for improved service to patrons.

An excellent summary describing the nature of the problems that fines entail for the library staff was provided in the presentation by the Alameda County Library's Administrative Assistant in the March, 1970, proposal to eliminate fines:

> The branch clerical work involved in maintaining accurate records, collecting, and accounting for fines was the subject of a time study in February, 1970. The study produced evidence that 15% of every branch library clerk's time is spent on fine-related activities. The most significant aspect of the time spent on fines is its inflexibility. Clerks must interrupt whatever

they are doing to attend to books being checked in (to check date due, collect fines, and record cash) each time patrons return library materials. This is continual during open hours.

Each morning, books returned through the bookdrop must be checked in and records made on patrons who owe fines on books returned during the night. The cash collected during the day must be counted daily, recorded, and taken to the bank to change into cashiers checks as a precaution against theft. Monthly reports on cash receipts are made up and submitted, carefully examined by the headquarters office, reconciled with the records of cashiers checks received, and checked annually by the Auditor's Office. (Ref. 59)

On the subject of the collecting of fine money, the Douglas County Librarian wrote as follows:

I have no idea how many times the money is counted but with today's salaries each minute is costly. The advantages of improved public relations and ability to concentrate one's full attention on library service are more important in my eyes. (Ref. 51)

The Andover Public Library, in deciding to drop fines, summarized for many libraries the problem facing the circulation desk staff, whether to devote their attention to the positive or negative aspects of the work:

Time and convenience of all borrowers is sacrificed in order to serve delinquent patrons when the desk staff accepts fines, makes change, and maintains records. If anyone is punished, it is the larger group of patrons who receive poorer service from the charge desk. (Ref. 1)

The Douglas County Librarian described how staff time can be diverted away from the primary purpose of furnishing service, even on a bookmobile as well as at the circulation desk in a branch library:

I recall hearing a Yakima City Library staff member complaining when she came in from a bookmobile run because she had been so busy writing fine slips (a flu epidemic had hit) that she couldn't help children find the books they wanted. These were books she knew were on the machine. (Ref.51)

The Dedham Public Library, after a 14-month experiment in abolishing all overdue fines, reported that "One of the positive advantages has been the freeing of staff to give more help to patrons." (Ref. 29)

This experience was borne out by the members of the Alameda County Library staff who were interviewed for this study. They feel that service to patrons is improved in that all the staff time is spent for positive service rather than the negative acts of collecting money or restricting loans because of fines records outstanding against the patron. They also describe as a real benefit the elimination of all the "hassling" about fines that they used to have to engage in with patrons.

The only negative note in this regard that was produced by the literature search was the Virginia Beach Public Library report on an unhappy two-month exper-

iment without fines. They began with "a belief that far too much staff time was spent in fine collection and overdue book notification," but after their experiment resulted in a large increase in overdues, they changed to "a belief that far too much staff time was spent in overdue work" that had been created by the absence of fines. (Ref. 9)

The Alameda County Library staff feels that the elimination of fines-related duties has saved a lot of time, which now is being devoted to the increased circulation enjoyed by the Alameda County Library System. The clerical staff is working just as hard as ever, but on more positive activities. The Fremont Main Lead Clerk wrote this summary:

> In Fremont Main's case I don't see how we could have handled fine collection along with our other heavy circulation duties. The sheer volume of work here inhibits adding any other functions to the circulation work; the public tends to become impatient of standing in line. More staff would not have solved the problem either; only so many people can work efficiently behind the circulation desk at one time. (Ref. 72)

b. Circulation increases when the psychological barrier of fear of punishment for late returns is removed.

One way to get a gross measurement of the use of a public library is to look at its circulation statistics. Although the libraries that abolished fines for overdue books did so primarily for other reasons, several of them reported their hopes and eventual experiences that the elimination of fines would result in an increase in circulation. When the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore announced its no-fine experimental period for children's books, the first item on its list of hoped-for benefits was the following:

> 1. Thousands of children will have the opportunity to use their library cards again (a by-product should be an increase in circulation). (Ref. 13)

The report of the first two years of the Enoch Pratt experiment indicated that circulation did increase the first year, but declined in the second year for reasons attributed to changes in the community and in the library staff:

> The first year of the experiment did show a marked change in both children's registration and book circulation. ... Juvenile circulation statistics for 1968-69 were up by 32,438, despite a decrease in circulation of adult books. ... It is the second-year results that are disappointing. For the second year, 1969-70, both circulation and registration show a decrease. It is difficult to pinpoint reasons; however, there are several factors which may be relevant. The lack of continuity in staff caused a breakdown in the educative aspect in some agencies. Some neighborhoods were and are constantly changing. Many reading families have moved out. (Ref. 19)

The Vigo County Library in Terre Haute "discontinued fines on the assumption

that fines are a psychological, and frequently economic, barrier to the use of libraries, or, more specifically, to the borrowing of materials." After eight months of a no-fine operation, the library was very enthusiastic about the effects on circulation, reporting that its branches "are lending more and losing less. Although other factors have contributed to the overall increase, it is believed that the discontinuance of fines has exerted the major impact. The fine barrier has been broken in Vigo County." (Ref. 21)

The only negative experience in this regard that was noted in the literature was that of the Morrisson-Reeves Public Library in Richmond, Indiana. After only 3½ months of a fine-free experiment that was supposed to last for six months, the library dropped the no-fine policy. One of the reasons given was that "circulation had decreased instead of increasing." (Ref. 15)

The experience of the Alameda County Library, however, has been that circulation has increased considerably, especially children's, according to interviews with the staff. They also report that individuals feel freer about taking more books out, with the spectre of heavy fines no longer looming over them.

c. Many borrowers, including a large number of children, are once again enabled to use the library, through restoration of their previously-revoked borrowing privileges.

To the Enoch Pratt Library, this factor seemed a natural beginning for their experiment to abolish fines on overdue children's books:

> A logical first step in improving services to children would be to permit the thousands of children already deprived of borrowing privileges because of fines to use their library cards again. Promptly the circulation department began a survey of the extent to which the problem of fines had deprived the Pratt library of young users who had already evinced an interest in its services. (Ref. 19)

In reporting on the "Amnesty Day" that was held by the Chicago Public Library in 1968, during which a tremendous number of books was returned on a fine-free day, a "fringe-benefit" of the Amnesty Day idea was identified:

> Among other very heartening things was the number of people who were able to take out library cards again. Some of them had long been delinquent, for a variety of reasons, but this once-in-a-lifetime amnesty made it possible for them to return books and clear their records.(Ref.6)

In his statement of intention to hold an Amnesty Day modeled after the Chicago experience, the New Rochelle Library Director said:

> We are doing this, not so much for the return of the books (although that will be helpful) but as a gesture of good will. The trustees hope that, in addition to the return of books that have "walked off" the shelves,

> many people will clear their record or renew their cards which they have allowed to lapse because of overdue books. ... We are more interested in the return of people--as well as the books--than in the payment of fines. (Ref. 6)

The Alameda County Library, in adopting a fine-free policy, has in effect declared somewhat of an Amnesty Day every day, with the beneficial results described above by other libraries. Now the "delinquent file" can be limited to just that hard-core minority of borrowers who would be uncooperative whether the library had fines or not. As a leading library textbook says:

> Commercial concerns, doing the volume of business which public libraries do, expect and experience a certain rate of loss of items stolen, purchased on credit and never paid for, or bought on the installment plan and repossessed but not for full value. Such losses are part of the cost of doing business, and they are probably less in libraries than in retail business. (Ref. 47)

Along with viewing losses as an inevitable cost of doing business, and attempting to penalize only the hard-core delinquents rather than the great majority of "customers," some libraries have gone even farther, and are modelling after another business approach to trust the average person, by sending out their "credit cards" broadside to the public. The Brooklyn Public Library's Procedures Committee that was asked to facilitate "the capacity of the library to respond to the community without unnecessary inhibition by red tape, obsolete concepts, or bureaucratic methods," made the following recommendation:

> Immediate issuing of library cards to children below 7th grade; mailing of cards to all adult borrowers having clear records. (Ref. 20)

Similarly, the Genesee County Libraries, which include the Flint Public Library System in Michigan, sent a library card to 180,000 registered voters in the county, "whether they asked for it or not." (Ref. 18)

In summary, when the Enoch Pratt Library encountered some criticism after announcing its intention to abolish children's fines for an experiment, a Baltimore newspaper columnist came to the library's defense as follows:

> They call it a second chance; and if you're going to deny a kid that much, count me out. (Ref. 19)

2. <u>The library collection</u>.

The basic assumption behind having fines for overdue materials is that fines serve as an incentive to the borrower to return the materials on time so that others can use them. However, in much the same fashion that the death penalty has been shown not to be the deterrent against capital crimes that was originally thought to be the case, there is now a considerable body of experience to indicate that fines do not serve as a deterrent to the late return of books. In fact,

fines are often actually counter-productive in this regard, serving instead as a deterrent to returning overdue books whose fines have mounted up to a sizeable level.

a. Fines have little or no effect on the promptness of return of library materials.

The Dakota County Library System began its existence with a no-fines policy, but instituted fines three years later. After two years with fines, the library reported that a study "indicated that the fines had not appreciably hurried the return of the books." So fines were again abolished, and after two years without fines, the library reports that "Continuing studies indicate no slow-down in the return of books." (Ref. 49)

The Dedham Public Library, when it began its fine-free policy, had become convinced that "fines were not proving to be a deterrent." (Ref. 25) The Wandsworth Library in England stated that "Most children's librarians believe that fines are no spur to the return of books." (Ref. 45) The Genesee County Libraries, after six months without fines, reported that "Generally, there has been no significant change either way in the amount of overdues or the length of time they're kept overdue." (Ref. 53) The Daniel Boone Regional Library reports: "Under the no-fine system, we have found that overdues remain on the same percentage level in relation to total circulation as they did under the old system." (Ref. 50)

These libraries bear out the experience of the Alameda County Library staff, who agree that the same people who used to return books promptly when fines were charged still do so, and conversely, those who continuously used to keep books out overdue still do so. This consistency of human nature was also revealed in a survey of libraries that had raised their fines, conducted by the Akron Public Library in 1964:

> Eight libraries noticed a reduction in overdue notices varying from slight to down one-third. Seven others, reflecting on the usual pattern of human nature, said that notices declined at first, only to return later to the former high number. (Ref. 38)

In fact, there seems to be an eerie stability to the percentage of books that are kept overdue, regardless of the fines policy that the library may have. A British survey on fines reported that "Whatever the fine, there is a sustained rate of return up to the end of a 28-day period." (Ref. 45) A basic textbook for public librarians is even more specific on this subject:

> The matter of overdues illustrates the value of rethinking a technical problem in the light of accumulated experience and modern conditions. It appears that the number and incidence of overdue books can be reduced but not eliminated. Some libraries have tried charging no overdue fine and some have levied a heavier than usual fine; either way a few books are always

> kept overdue (about 4 to 5 for every 100 borrowed) and some are never recovered (about 2 to 3 out of every 10,000 loaned). This low figure deserves publicizing as evidence that public libraries are not wrapped in red tape but are effective guardians of public property, to see that each book is kept in uninterrupted use. (Ref. 47)

This percentage held fairly true for the Dedham Public Library, which reported on its first 14 months of a fine-free system as follows:

> To use the example of the Children's Room with a rough average circulation of 1400 weekly, we send out 84 notices or roughly 6 percent of the total. Less than 1 percent require billing procedures. So far we have not had to resort to any suspension of library privileges, nor have we had to consider employing a special messenger to go out and retrieve our material. (Ref. 25)

The abolition of fines does seem in some instances to result in a slightly slower rate of return than previously, but the libraries reporting this phenomenon feel that it is well worth it because of the much higher overall rate of return that is experienced in a fine-free system. The Coalinga District Library, after two years without fines, reports that "while a majority of items are returned late (1 to 3 days), a greater majority of materials are returned prior to the issuance of the first notice. It is rare to have to send a second notice, and rarer still to have to file for Small Claims Court action. We do not have less overdues than before; but we do have a higher ratio of returns." (Ref. 48)

The Alameda County Library staff agrees with this evaluation, recognizing that more books are overdue a few days than before, but not overdue long enough to be receiving a notice, so the tardiness is not felt to be serious. The staff also concurs that with the no-fines policy, the books do get returned now, rather than being kept out forever as they used to be when fines were in effect.

The question arises then as to the impact of the no-fines policy on the collection that is available on the shelves for use by the patrons. After a careful analysis of reserved books during the first eight months under a no-fines policy, the Vigo County Library concluded:

> Problems encountered in meeting user demand are no greater under the no-fine policy, and perhaps even less in view of the improved relations between the library staff and the users. (Ref. 21)

Most of the libraries in the Alameda County Library System report little noticeable effect on the collection from eliminating fines. Most of the branches try to buy extra copies of titles that are asked for most frequently, which people tend to keep for longer periods of time. During the school year, many students will keep books out for the entire term, thus making them unavailable for others. The Coalinga District Library reports solving this latter problem by working with

the school librarians "to exert pressure we cannot." (Ref. 48)

There are some libraries that report a decrease in the number of overdues after fines have been abolished. The Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore reports as follows:

> Fines do not appear to be the answer to the ever-increasing overdue book problem. A count of the number of unreturned children's books at the end of the two-year period was smaller by 14,700 than at the beginning. (Ref. 19)

The American School Library in Brazil reported, after one year's experience without fines, "This has succeeded in cutting down on our overdue list." (Ref.22) Similarly, the Windsor Public Library in Canada, after six months without fines, "reports that the new policy has been a rousing success, substantially reducing overdues." (Ref. 32)

Another type of indication that the elimination of fines might actually improve the rate of return of borrowed materials is provided by the Vigo County Library. It recorded the number of borrowers' cards that it was forced to suspend during the months before and after the abolition of fines, and found to its surprise and pleasure that the percentage of suspensions decreased markedly after fines were abolished. (Ref. 21) The Alameda County Library staff who were interviewed concurred in this conclusion, most of them feeling that the number of overdues actually has decreased a bit in proportion to the volume of circulation.

There are, however, a few libraries which report negative findings regarding the abolition of fines. After four months of a planned six-month experiment without fines, the Morrisson-Reeves Public Library in Richmond, Indiana, reported a 60 percent increase in overdues. (Ref. 15) In a two-month experiment without fines, the Virginia Beach Public Library reported a 304 percent increase in overdues in just the first month, and they "learned that without fines, many felt no need to return books on the date indicated." They gave up their earlier "belief that patrons will return books when they are through with them, regardless of overdue charges," and changed to "a belief that fines do encourage book return, and a belief that the ill will generated because of the unavailability of current fiction was much more costly than that generated by fines." (Ref. 9)

In a similarly negative vein, the Pennsylvania State Library, which is more of a research-oriented or academic library than a typical public library, has instituted a fines system after a 225-year experience without fines. It was "driven to establishing a standard system of fines and overdue notices after overdue books began to run well over 1/3 of the total monthly circulation." The problem was further described as follows:

> Thousands of books remained overdue for months at a time. Students in local colleges would take out books and keep them for the semester, as would local college students attending schools all over the country. Also the researcher who took care of all his private book needs by charging out everything he needed for a project lasting 1 or 2 years. The library's interest was hardly ever considered. The academic libraries are familiar with this problem since it is similar to theirs with faculty loans. (Ref. 39)

Thus we see that libraries and librarians are as individual as the people who make up their clientele. Communities naturally will differ in many regards, and one regard seems to be the receptivity to the idea of abolishing fines. This fact justifies the tendency of libraries and their governing boards to try an experimental period without fines before making it a final policy. The preponderance of evidence from those reporting in the professional literature, and the experience of the Alameda County Library during its own experimental period, indicate that the fine-free policy is much more likely than not to prove worthwhile.

b. Many long-overdue books are returned when the fear of a large fine has been eliminated.

Recognition of the belief that many long-overdue books are kept by the borrower indefinitely, because he does not want to have to pay a large fine that has built up, is exemplified in the practice of a number of libraries that hold "Amnesty Days," when overdue books may be returned with no questions asked and no fines assessed. When the results of the Amnesty Days are evaluated, that belief is usually confirmed beyond any doubt.

The St. Louis Public Library had an Amnesty Day in 1955, "which produced 1,700 lost, strayed, or stolen books, including some which had been missing from the shelves as long as five years." Ten years later, the Library repeated the practice, and received 4,500 books that were overdue. "Most of the books returned had been kept out a year or two, although many dated back to 1953. The longest overdue was a volume on education which had been kept out of the library for 44 years." (Ref. 2) Incidentally, in 1970 the same library began a no-fines policy on children's books for a trial period of one year. (Ref. 16)

Despite a snowy day, the Chicago Public Library had an Amnesty Day in 1968 that resulted in the return of 104,893 overdue and stolen books, some of them missing for as long as 39 years. (Ref. 7) A reader could return books without embarrassment, and renew his privileges. "Almost all of the books were in good condition; there were some rarities, many out-of-prints, bound periodicals, and books from other libraries. The Art Department alone recovered 700 volumes." (Ref. 6)

The impact of these dramatic results on four city librarians in Westchester

County was quite varied, underscoring the point made at the conclusion of the preceding section, that libraries and librarians will differ just as do their clienteles. The Mount Vernon Library reported having its own amnesty program a year earlier "with not too startling results; they are certainly useful at infrequent intervals." Yonkers "doesn't believe in it because it encourages delinquent borrowers." Scarsdale likewise does not believe in amnesty; "do it once and the delinquent patron is apt to think he can get away with it again sometimes and thereby hold off on returning overdues." On the other hand, New Rochelle had a positive reaction, with plans underway for an amnesty day during National Library Week, saying "We are more interested in the return of people--as well as the books--than in the payment of fines. We'll be criticized for this, too. Wish us luck." (Ref. 6)

As illustrated by the examples of St. Louis and New Rochelle, a no-fines policy can be considered an extension of the Amnesty Day idea. The reasoning is that if a single day without fines will get a lot of books back that otherwise would have remained lost to the library forever, and if it additionally will result in the reinstatement of borrowing privileges for many members of the community, and if it furthermore will greatly improve the public relations between the library and the community, then it might be a good idea to have a kind of library amnesty on a continuous basis, a fine-free operation.

Most libraries that have instituted a no-fines policy report an increase in the number of long-overdue books that are returned, or a corresponding decrease in "lost" books. The Genesee County Libraries reported after six months without fines: "We have been well pleased with the results. The immediate effect was the return of quite a number of long-time overdues." (Ref. 53) The Douglas County Library's fine-free experience (since its opening day in 1955) was described in a recent newspaper article:

> Another valuable asset to the no-fine policy, in the County Librarian's words, is that people are not afraid to bring books back when there are no fines. Douglas County Library figures show this to be basically true. During the period between July 1, 1956, and June 30, 1971, 4,183 books were counted as lost from the library system. Total circulation for that period was 7,431,344. The percentage of loss was a mere .057. Furthermore, since June 30, 1971, 23 of those lost books have been returned. (Ref. 55)

The Vigo County Library, after eight months in 1968 without fines, reported that 612 books due in 1966 and 1967 had been returned, plus two that were due in 1961. A humorous note is provided by the book that was due in February, 1967, and was returned 14 months later; the title was "Seven Days to Faster Reading." (Ref. 21) The same library later reported on its 2½ year period without fines that its total loans were 1,417,164, of which only 1,292 items had not been re-

turned, representing less than 1/10 of 1 percent. "Library officials conclude that the charging of a fine is not an influencing factor, since the fine in actuality would be a deterrent to the return of these materials." (Ref. 11)

The only negative experience in this regard that appeared in the literature search was the "disastrous" fine-free four-month experiment of the Morrisson-Reeves Public Library in Richmond, Indiana. They reported that "No long-overdue materials were flushed out of hiding." (Ref. 15)

The staff of the Alameda County Library who were interviewed agree that patrons under a fine-free system now voluntarily return long overdue books, and they regard this as a major improvement in operations. A verification of this fact lies in the much lower number of "lost" books that are on the "search lists." The interview with the Fremont Main Lead Clerk produced this evaluation of the difference before and after fines were abolished:

> We were very impressed with the immediate results of discontinuing fines. We received so many books back that were years overdue, either because the patrons may never have received a notice on them due to a mistake on our part but noticed they were overdue a long time later with large fines due, or because they were deliberately kept out when the fines grew so large. In either event, the people were glad to return the books just to get them off their consciences.
>
> Fines are not an incentive to return long-overdue books; it is just the reverse. Just levying a fine on an overdue book doesn't mean we actually collected the fine. We ended up with a great many fine notices just sitting in the drawer. (Ref. 75)

If a library that does have fines also suffers with a large number of "lost" or forever-unreturned books as the Alameda County Library used to have, then the related problem of replacements must be dealt with. The Coalinga District Library identified this factor as being one of the major reasons they dropped fines in 1967: "The library prefers return of material to having to replace. Many times we cannot replace the unreturned item; and of course you know it always costs more to replace an item than you charge for it." (Ref. 48)

3. The nature of the library's clientele.

Since a public library is a social institution, its operations should be based on the nature of the clientele that is being served. Many librarians have come to realize that their system of fines operates primarily against a minority of the population being served. In addition, the fines especially hamper library services to the underprivileged and to children, two large sectors of society for whom library services are especially intended and especially important.

a. Most patrons are responsible and conscientious, with only a constant mi-

norities being uncooperative.

The question facing libraries is whether to design their procedures with the conscientious or the uncooperative patron uppermost in mind. The Director of the Pennsylvania State Library expresses the negative viewpoint most clearly:

> I suppose the decision on whether to fine or not to fine depends largely on one's basic beliefs about human nature. If you believe that all people are basically honest, charitable toward others, and cooperative, you could also believe a system of library fines to be unnecessary. However, if you believe, as I do, that there is always a sizeable minority of the citizenry who is fundamentally dishonest, selfish, and careless, then a system of library fines becomes essential. In support of the latter view, I call up burgeoning shoplifting, petty thievery, nonpayment of bills, vandalism, unscrupulous consumer practices, and littering of the countryside as sympathetic witnesses. The basis of most law is the need to keep this unsociable minority in line with the overall requirements of an ordered society. (Ref. 39)

Support for this negative view of library patrons is voiced by the Virginia Beach Public Library, which, after a two-month trial period without fines, reinstated them. One of the reasons given for returning to fines was "a realization that patrons will not cooperate to make such a plan possible." (Ref. 9)

The positive outlook is voiced by the Douglas County Librarian who has not had a system of fines since the library began service in 1955:

> We rely on people's honor. No library can exist unless people are honorable. Probably 70 per cent of the library's borrowers accept their responsibilities and return their books on time or renew them. The remaining 30 per cent do cost the library time and money in postage, but sending overdue notices is one of the services the library should provide. (Ref. 55)

After a 14-month experiment in abolishing all overdue fines, the Dedham Public Library stated in a progress report:

> Further study revealed it to be the same patrons over and over again who refused to either pay fines or to pay attention to any number of notices or telephone calls. We believed then and have been given no reason to recant the basic tenet that the majority of our patrons are responsible and reasonably conscientious. (Ref. 25)

When the no-fines policy was first announced in the Alameda County Library System, many clerks were skeptical of the decision at first, for fear that many patrons would be taking advantage of the system. But their experience has been that this occurs only on the briefer overdues of a few days or so. The staff members agree that the same people who were conscientious about promptly returning books in the past still are conscientious about it when there are no fines, and those who were slow returners still are slow. "Human nature didn't change; people still return their books on the day they are due, in general," says the Lead Clerk at the Fremont Main Library. (Ref. 75)

A further example of trust in human nature is provided by those libraries that send borrowers cards broadside to the community. The Procedures Committee of the Brooklyn Public Library recommended "Immediate issuing of library cards to children below 7th grade; and mailing of cards to all adult borrowers having clear records." (Ref. 20) The Genesee County Libraries, which include the Flint, Michigan, Public Library System, sent a library card to 180,000 registered voters in the county, "whether they asked for it or not." (Ref. 18)

In thinking about the hard-core minority of library patrons who might be uncooperative in disregarding the needs of others, it is well to keep in mind that such patrons are not necessarily those whom we might normally consider as typically anti-social. For example, some branches in the Alameda County Library System have found that school teachers are taking advantage of the no-fines policy! The Coordinator of Children's Services reports as follows:

> Now that there are no fines, it has become obvious to the craftier teachers that by checking out two books here and two books there (the limit allowed to be checked out on any one subject at any one time), they can have all the books on a subject they please and keep them in their classroom for as long as they please. There is remarkably little concept of "sharing" among teachers -- if their class is provided for, they don't really care about the plight of the others, despite the fact that all classes within the same grade are studying the same topic at the same time. We haven't really thought of a solution to this. (Ref. 73)

The Coalinga District Library, California, identifies transients as another consistently troublesome group that makes up the population of uncooperative borrowers:

> Our greatest recovery problem is with transient borrowers who are not residents of the District. If you have a large percentage of borrowers in this category, I would not recommend a fine free system unless you have a strong pre-deposit set-up. (Ref. 48)

However, the Indianapolis experiment in overdue procedures questions whether this transient population would be any more conscientious about returning books they borrow, with or without fines or overdue notices:

> Assuming that most of these 19 borrowers (whose late overdue notices were returned by the post-office as undeliverable) were transients, we conclude that few of these would have taken the trouble to return their materials, however many notices they had received. (Ref. 40)

The Coalinga District Librarian considers the size of the total population being served as a limiting factor on whether a no-fines policy should be instituted:

> If you are a large library operation, and are unable to perform service at a very close and personalized level, perhaps you would want to consider most carefully before attempting a fine-free system. Frankly, I don't believe it will work successfully in a library serving a very large population. (Ref. 48)

However, the Genesee County Libraries (including the Flint, Michigan, Public Library System) reported in January, 1970, that they "have been well pleased with the results" (Ref. 53) of the fine-free system they began in 1969, at which time it was reported "The two library systems are claimed to be the largest ever to try the elimination of fines." (Ref. 23) The experience of the Alameda County Library System, also considered a "large" system, has also been quite favorable, so the supposition that a fine-free system might be suitable only for smaller libraries has not proven valid.

In summary, the social institution of the public library seems to be able to function more effectively when it decides to take a positive approach to the conscientiousness of its clientele than when it views them in a negative fashion. Thus the Alameda County Library is in accord with the prevailing temper of the times, which believes that all social institutions, including schools, prisons, churches, etc., as well as libraries, should re-structure themselves to accommodate an enlightened view of man's nature as being more responsible and trustworthy than had been viewed in earlier times. There will always be some who will be transgressors, but it would be wrong to structure a social institution to deal with that minority at the expense of the majority.

b. <u>There should be greater recognition of the service needs of the disadvantaged members of the community, who can least afford to pay fines</u>.

At the beginning of the experiment to abolish fines for children's overdue books at the Enoch Pratt Public Library in Baltimore, "the circulation department began a survey of the extent to which the problem of fines had deprived the Pratt library of young users who had already evinced an interest in its services."(Ref.19)

> The Baltimore circulation study found that--disregarding the problem of the "nonuser" completely--there were 27,014 children who had been deprived of their library cards because they had lost their books or incurred prohibitive overdue fines. Of the 27,000, no less than 17,000 were in inner-city branches. It is significant that 17,000 "disadvantaged" children were at one time reached by Pratt children's librarians to the extent that library cards were issued, books borrowed, and at some subsequent times fines accrued and cards withheld. (Ref. 19)

After one year of the experiment, the circulation study committee of the Enoch Pratt Library issued an interim report which recommended approval for another year of experimentation, which was granted. Since then the no-fines program has continued indefinitely, without being formally adopted as a permanent policy. The interim report contained the following evaluation of the program's effect on disadvantaged children:

> The first year of the experiment did show a marked increase in both children's registration and book circulation. ... The largest percentage

of increase (in registration) was in inner-city agencies. (Ref. 19)

After two years of the experiment, the following policy conclusions were reached:

> The gains that offset the loss of fine revenue cannot be put down in monetary value. It is particularly important for children who are financially unable to pay fines, or whose parents would pay the fine but refuse to allow the children to borrow books again, to have the opportunity to borrow books without fear. If the Library is to continue to serve inner city residents, the no-fines policy, with some adjustment to make its application more equitable as far as adult borrowers are concerned, should become a permanent part of services to children. (Ref.19)

The Fort Vancouver and Spokane County Libraries cited the following as one of the reasons that they decided to give up charging fines:

> This decision is based on more than cost factors. The librarian cited the "Libraries and the Unreached" institute at the University of Washington in 1969 when non-users told the librarians their fear of fines. (Ref. 43)

A recent editorial in the Library Journal by the Director of the Montclair Public Library asks the following question in concluding his attack on the fines system: "What good are all our 'outreach' programs if our new-found audience is turned off by the atmosphere it finds when reaching in?" (Ref. 10) An eloquent summary of the position for eliminating fines in order to remove a barrier to library use by the underprivileged was provided by the Anoka County Library:

> When, in the next few years, social workers and teachers involved in such programs as the War on Poverty, VISTA, or Higher Horizons inevitably succeed in encouraging new patrons to make use of their public libraries, we fineless ones are not going to have to spend one moment trying to explain compulsive middle-class habits, outmoded penological methods, or paper work in general, to people who may quite possibly not own a calendar. (Ref. 5)

Since it is not the underprivileged who form the minority of uncooperative patrons, and since it is the underprivileged who can least afford to pay fines, the conclusion is inescapable that to remove fines would remove a real barrier to library use on the part of those who need it so deeply, without harmful effects to the library.

c. Children suffer unduly from fines and the loss of borrowing privileges, even though the fault may often not be theirs.

The interview with the Fremont Main Lead Clerk produced a poignant summary of the former situation in which children were subject to fines for overdue books:

> The most agonizing time spent at the circulation desk was in connection with fines, especially with children. Children usually want to check out a number of books at one time, and although there was a maximum total fine of $1.00, most of the children didn't have it. This made

so many parents angry with the children that they revoked their children's library privileges themselves. It was a very bad policy because it was as if we were penalizing the children.

The staff's attitude toward a repeated delinquent was more an embarrassment for the staff than it was considering the patron as a criminal. This happened especially when a child would lose or forget his card, and then find out when the staff checked the registration file that he owed a couple of small fines. The staff would ask for the money from the child, who is stricken because he doesn't have it with him. The rules forbade giving him another card until he paid something on the old fines to show his good faith, so now he can't check out a book that he needs for school. And now he knows that until he can pay part of his fine there is no use in coming back to the library. (Ref. 75)

The Sheffield City Librarian described the experience of the Wandsworth Library and his opinions of the consequences:

When Wandsworth increased fines in 1954 there was a lot of criticism from parents and by March 1960 we found that 1,536 children had stopped using the library. Since then, and another increase, a further 1,066 children have ceased to use the libraries. The small number of books that will not be returned because of the abolition of fines is a small price to pay for drawing children into the net of activities that all our libraries provide. If parents played their full part in seeing that their children returned books promptly, that price would be even less.

In practise it is not a matter of the child being penalised; about 90% of children's fines are paid by the parents; and it is so easy for a stupid parent to say to a child who constantly comes running for fines: "You're not having any more books." Every ticket filed away with a little note of the fine owed -- each one representing a child who will almost certainly never show his face in the library again -- represents a failure of the system of fining children. (Ref. 45)

Some additional impressive statistics about the effect of fines on children arose when the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore had its circulation department make a survey "of the extent to which the problem of fines had deprived the Pratt library of young users who had already evinced an interest in its services:"

The Baltimore circulation study found that--disregarding the problem of the "nonuser" completely--there were 27,014 children who had been deprived of their library cards because they had lost their books or incurred prohibitive overdue fines.

In addition, a check of the records in circulation control showed that many of the children had lost their cards through fines on the first books they borrowed. These youngest potential library borrowers lost their cards before they really got started. This indicates that the youngest candidates for library cards do not fully understand what they are supposed to do. (Ref. 19)

Abolishing fines has of course removed this undesirable situation from the Alameda County Library's operations, that of parents removing their children's borrowing privileges when the children incurred fines, or even when the child's brothers or sisters had outstanding overdue charges. Similarly, the need and

desire of children's librarians to try to intercede in such situations on behalf of the children have also passed. To assist in publicizing this aspect of children's service even more broadly, the Fremont Main Children's Librarian has suggested that an explanatory note should go home with the application for a child's library card, telling parents about the no-fines policy. He feels that this would result in even more parents allowing their children to have library cards.

There are, naturally, some negative viewpoints on having no fines for children. The Virginia Beach Public Library, which first eliminated fines and then reinstated them after a dismal two-month trial period, found that "many nickles and dimes sent with the children by parents not aware of the new policy were quickly converted to cokes and candy bars." (Ref. 9) Evidently these children were not in the disadvantaged group discussed in the preceding section.

An interesting insight into the reaction of today's children to the no-fines policy that was instituted a couple of years ago in the Alameda County Library is provided by the Coordinator of Children's Services:

> We expected the children to feel a new sense of freedom; instead they accept no fines as a birthright. The schools don't charge fines in their library, and their memories are short. They don't recall that we ever did. The parents, now, THEY feel freer. (Ref. 73)

Thus, no discussion of fines for children's overdues can be complete without considering the adults too. As the Fremont Main Lead Clerk pointed out, "So often it is not the children who are returning the books late, but their parents, so the children were being penalized under the old system for their parents' tardiness." (Ref. 75) The Enoch Pratt Library study verifies this viewpoint with the statement that "The futility of the effort and our concept of 'educating' children to be prompt becomes clearest when we realize that it is adult borrowers of children's books who are the worst offenders." (Ref. 19)

Perhaps the best summary of the ideals held by the advocates of a no-fines policy for children is in the recommendation on this subject by the Brooklyn Public Library Procedures Committee, which was established in 1969 to increase "the capacity of the library to respond to the community without being inhibited by red tape, obsolete concepts, or bureaucratic methods." The recommendation was:

> Abolition of all overdue fines for children, reduction in amounts charged for lost children's books, and no curtailing of children's borrowing privileges because of unreturned materials. (Ref. 20)

Thus it is seen that the Alameda County Library is contemporary with the trends and viwpoints of responsible library innovators around the country, in removing unnecessary barriers to library use on the part of children, who are often

not to blame for the late return of their books. As an important part of the educational apparatus of the community, the public library should do all it can to encourage children to read and to gain knowledge that will improve their lot and that of society.

4. Fairness to patrons.

When fines are imposed, there are inevitably a number of instances in which some innocent persons may suffer while some guilty ones go unpunished. These inequities are regrettable not only from a moral viewpoint, but also because of the damage that is done to fruitful relationships between the library and its public. Several libraries in the literature search cited these factors as influencing their decision to abolish fines, and the experience of the Alameda County Library staff who were interviewd supports this viewpoint.

a. We should avoid penalizing those who are not chronic offenders, or who may be returning books late because of unusual circumstances, or who are innocent victims of errors.

In her summary of the experiment of the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore, the Associate Editor of the School Library Journal feels that charging fines tends to make libraries treat all patrons who return books late as though they had deliberately done so:

> Reading over the memos and reports, I was jolted time and again by the numerous references to "delinquent" borrowers, an unnecessarily if unconsciously damaging term for an absent-minded user. There really is a difference between returning a book late and not returning it at all, and perhaps insisting on such punctuality may indeed be utopian.(Ref.19)

The librarian of the Sheffield City Libraries in England points out that many regular library users are chronically slightly overdue in returning their books:

> Why should we penalise the habitually slow reader; the reader of "solid" books; busy people; old people; and those who just forget for a few days? People in these categories must account for the vast majority of overdues--the rest are the tiny proportion who just won't return their books regularly. The person fined often comes to regard the fine not as a penalty but as a license to keep his books overdue.
>
> Every public librarian knows readers who always return their books regularly--but always a few days overdue. They pay the fines, and go and choose more books, which they keep overdue...and so on. What is the point of going on taking the money off such people? If they had no fines to pay, they would, I am certain, go on keeping their books for the same length of time, and returning them just as regularly. (Ref. 45)

A Minnesota librarian calls attention to the great many borrowers who cannot get to the library to return their books on time, even though intending to do so:

> Another source of amazement to me is the common lack of appreciation--by those fining librarians who take the trouble to mail their

> written thoughts--of the plight of innocent patrons, well-meaning conscientious folk who once in a while are prevented by unusual circumstance from returning books on their due date. It may come as a shock to some of my fellow professionals, but there really are unanticipated events in the primary part of people's lives which prevent them from opening library books and searching to find out when the fines will begin. Sometimes babies arrive early and mothers leave for hospitals without reminding fathers to return books. Sometimes accidents put automobiles and occupants out of commission, leaving worried family members without much time for attention to those responsibilities for the public welfare that all good library patrons are supposed never to neglect.
>
> Fineless libraries do not need to punish people for the heresy of considering dramatic real-life events more important than the incurrence of library debts. This point struck me with especial force on the afternoon of President Kennedy's assassination, when only a handful of books were returned to our bookmobile. Had I to fine people for staying with their newsbroadcasts on that day I would have: (1) resigned; (2) paid their fines myself; or (3) subverted my orders and falsified my records, as I am well aware many kind library clerks do daily. (Ref. 5)

The library itself may be responsible for books being returned late, in two ways: delayed overdue notices and clerical errors. First, as pointed out by the Alameda County Library staff, a frequent public relations problem used to occur when there were fines, when the library fell behind in sending out overdue notices promptly. This would cause a great deal of resentment in patrons who were notified about their overdue books many weeks after they became overdue, resulting in high fines having accumulated. They blamed the library for the high fines, saying they would have returned the books sooner if they had been notified sooner that they were overdue.

A second way in which a library can contribute to late returns is from the inevitable clerical errors that will occur in dealing with a large number of detailed records. The Minnesota librarian discusses library errors as follows:

> Another typical innocent patron who is largely ignored in the literature on fines is the victim of clerical errors. One might assume that patrons are never victims of office mistakes, that ink pads are never so lush that dates come out looking like "8" instead of "3" or vice versa, that new patrons never walk off with a book before it has been checked in from the former patron who would not wait in line to be adjudged "clean." (Ref. 5)

Such errors have two unfortunate effects: (1) the innocent patrons become irate at receiving overdue notices for materials they have already returned, and (2) the patron who should have received the erroneous overdue notice receives no notification at all, so he may have the book out overdue without realizing it for some time, and then either blame the library for the high fine when he returns it, or just not return it at all in fear of the large fine that will be waiting for him when he does.

b. Conscientious borrowers are charged fines at the circulation desk, while others have learned how to "beat the system" in various ways.

The Dedham, Mass., Public Library report identified a distressing factor that is known to all librarians, and, unfortunately, to many library users:

> Leaving the philosophical implications of this question aside, we also discovered the convenience of the outside bookdrop was frequently abused by those "beating the system." (Ref. 25)

The Alameda County Library staff interviews revealed in greater detail just how the bookdrop convenience can be used to "beat the system." A very common problem was created by the books that were left by the patron without checking them in at the circulation desk, either returned through the slot during the hours the library was closed, or deliberately left there when the library was open, in the hope that the fine might not be noticed. Thus a great many fines had to be charged on books that the staff had to look up and type notices for. If the patron checked his books in at the desk, the fines would be assessed right then and there.

When work piles up during busy hours, the circulation staff may not be able to take the time to look the data up and record it, so they may just skip doing it at such times. This means that the fines will not be collected fairly, as some people will be getting away with late returns at busy hours. Those who returned the books in person and waited for the fine to be computed and paid it would thus be penalized for doing so; those who just returned the books and walked away would often not be charged for doing so.

Furthermore, if the amount due was less than 35 cents, the staff might not type up a fine notice for an overdue book that the patron returned without waiting for his fine to be assessed. The workload was always great, and it literally wasn't worth the time to type a fine notice for a small sum, considering the additional costs of postage, etc. Thus the staff was in a way doing their own cost-benefit evaluation on the spot, assigning priorities to their various duties when there was insufficient time to complete all of them. Although this conclusion to skip the small fine was justified in terms of library economy, it did result in furnishing the borrower another way to "beat the system."

The Anoka County Librarian also comments on the minimal-fine-forgiveness practice, and then points out another method by which her patrons have learned to "beat the system":

> The local librarians' grapevine informs me of something the ordinary citizen knows not. If one drops one's overdue books in the night chute and the unpaid fine is less than 75 cents, one will not be bothered with a bill. Thus, the good citizen who puts money in the book pocket is punished, and the careless one rewarded.
>
> There are other nasty little circumstances that only fineless librarians seem to be aware of--perhaps because we are free of them. For example, we are free from the charge that will tempt the immature and the poverty-stricken

into becoming "sneaky shelvers," who claim they have returned a book long ago--and point to it on the shelf where they have just placed it. (Ref. 5)

With the abolition of fines, the conscientious patron is not penalized, and the formerly "sneaky" borrower does not have a "system" to try to "beat". The chronic offender will have his borrowing privileges revoked, and everyone else enjoys the ability to use the library freely.

c. Inequalities are inevitably caused by variations in the strictness of enforcement among various staff members serving at the circulation desk.

One of the recommendations of the Brooklyn Public Library Procedures Committee, in a desire "to respond to community needs without being unnecessarily inhibited by red tape, obsolete concepts, or bureaucratic methods," was the following:

> Stressing in the training of both clerical and professional staff the importance of flexibility and use of common sense in applications of library rules, particularly in the handling of registration and fines, where the possibility is strong for alienating rather than serving borrowers. The committee is particularly concerned about those supervisors who tend to be more rigid than the staff members working under them. (Ref. 20)

Desirable as this concept sounds, it nevertheless generates some undesirable consequences, which helped the Dedham Public Library decide to abolish fines:

> In spite of training to the contrary, we discovered a wide variation in the enforcement of library rules and in our attempts to collect the fine money, inasmuch as some staff members were overly zealous while others "forgave their friends" far too easily. (Ref. 29)

The Sheffield, England, City Librarian, in an article advocating eliminating fines, agrees with the Dedham Library that in the endeavor to collect fines fairly, flexibility may not always be a good thing:

> People are pleased when you let them get away with their three-pence. This goodwill is surely dissipated when the next time they come in, the same assistant trims them for six-pence in circumstances that seem the same to them but for the fact that the librarian is watching.
>
> Either we charge or we don't; to say we should use a system "with discretion" is ridiculous. The amount of responsibility placed on assistants in such circumstances could get quite embarrassing. (Ref. 45)

The Richmond, Indiana, Library, which dropped fines and subsequently reinstated them, decided to handle this problem as follows:

> What shall we do now about cases of special hardship? We have resolved to treat such cases on individual merit--as dangerous and difficult as it may be--to give one person, the head of circulation, the authority to forgive fines or make special arrangements in cases where strict interpretation of rules and fines would work undue hardships. (Ref. 15)

Although this decision may sound workable, it could lead to some undesirable consequences of its own in actual practice. In the first place, the head of circulation

could not always be available during all the hours the library is open. So those who wished to state their case would either have to wait until another day or be referred to someone who had been delegated to act for the head of circulation, which again opens up the possibility for variable interpretation or enforcement of the regulations between the two library staff members. Secondly, the head of circulation surely has many more important duties than deciding matters involving fines, and the constant need to arbitrate "nickel-and-dime" questions might well be considered a wasteful use of her professional time.

The Alameda County Library staff officially had no power to forgive fines, partially or entirely, but of course they did so unofficially when there were good reasons. A typical example would be when a patron would report that his book had been stolen. If the book did turn up later, the staff was glad to waive the fine in return for getting the book back; if they did not waive the fine, the size of the fine that would have accumulated by then might well lead the borrower not to return the book at all.

With the elimination of fines, the pressures on the staff to arbitrate these kinds of monetary-charging problems is greatly reduced, and is limited to charges for lost or damaged books only. The patrons do not see themselves as the victims of inconsistent application of regulations, and do not have cause to suspect library staff members of giving special waivers of fines to their friends. The relationships between patrons and staff members is much healthier, and library use benefits accordingly.

5. The library's image and role.

In addition to the more tangible effects of a fine-free policy on the library's use, collection, and patrons, there are less tangible, yet centrally important, effects on the way in which the library is viewed by the community. When a library staff member assesses and collects a fine from a patron, whether adult or child, a social transaction occurs which will have its impacts, some of them subtle and some obvious, on both the library and the patron. Librarians and patrons are somewhat divided as to which impacts are desirable and which are undesirable, but most of those who have lived for a considerable period without fines agree that the absence of fines enables the library and the patron to have more meaningful relationships with one another without the undesirable barriers that fines create between the two.

a. Greatly improved relationships with patrons result when a greater service orientation replaces the disciplinarian role.

To describe the nature and seriousness of this problem, the Director of the Montclair Public Library assesses the image of the public librarian as follows:

> What do people think we do? Why, what they most often see us doing: charging

out books, collecting petty fines and fees, compiling absurd statistics, losing our cool with the teenagers, ignoring contemporary literature, and, above all, enforcing restrictive rules and regulations.

"There are a variety of barriers, real and imagined, that effectively prevent nonlibrary users from walking into libraries," wrote a psychologist in Library Journal a few years ago. "Most individuals are in various states of immaturity and feel threatened by authority, are intimidated by rules and fines, are repelled by the 'institutional' atmosphere of the library, or by its impersonality, or by the officiousness of particular individuals." (Ref. 10)

The Dedham Public Library, in deciding to abolish fines, included the following reasons (among others) for their decision:

> Library policy appeared to be petty and punitive. Students and adults felt it to be nitpicking. Children thought staff members were disciplinarians and overly strict. (Ref. 25)

The Sheffield City Librarian in England also advocates abolishing fines partly to improve the library's image:

> To abolish fines would contribute to better public relations; much of the public librarian's bad image may stem from fine-charging; we are seen, not as providers of information and books, but as collectors of threepences and sixpences. (Ref. 45)

The Rowley Free Public Library, Massachusetts, had abandoned fines for two years, and justified its action as follows:

> I feel very strongly that the library image built up over the years is dreadful. I don't want people meaching or fawning or feeling badly because a book is late; and I certainly don't want to play God, nor do I want kids to grow up feeling the library is a place of awe and terror. (Ref. 44)

In the Alameda County Library System, the Lead Clerk of the Fremont Main Branch describes the discomfort of the library staff that used to exist when fines were charged, as follows:

> The staff attitude had to be apologetic so much of the time, especially when overdue notices had not been sent out on time, and also when the library made mistakes in sending out notices, both of which would run up the fine. Often such patrons resisted paying the fines, seeing the size of the fine as the library's fault. (Ref. 75)

On the other hand, we cannot disregard completely the proper responsibility of the library in doing what it can to get its books returned promptly and to safeguard the public property that has been put in its trust. The question is where to draw the line between responsibility and pettiness, as described in a New Jersey survey of library practices with regard to overdue notices:

> Librarians have a responsibility to their Boards of Trustees and their municipalities to keep close check on the materials over which they are guardians. Just how far the burden of responsibility is to be carried is the question. How far need they go to retrieve books, records, and other materials, which negligent borrowers have failed to return or renew at the end of the loan period? (Ref. 42)

A leading textbook on public libraries states the duality of the problem another way:

> Final penalties, such as refusing the patron any further loans or even taking extreme cases to court, are desirable for their value in deterring others, and in publicizing the library's concern for the interests of other readers awaiting the books rather than in rules for their own sake, or for getting the books back to the shelves to stand idle there. (Ref. 47)

Additional remarks on the role of the library as an agency dispensing punishment for the transgressions of its clientele are furnished by two other libraries. When the Andover Public Library decided to eliminate overdue fines, it observed that "Punishment for not returning books on time is outdated, as well as humiliating." (Ref. 1) The Brooklyn Public Library's Procedures Committee, with the objective of making the library more responsive to the needs of the community, decided that "To give the procedures a more positive tone, recommendations would be aimed at emphasizing service and de-emphasizing maintenance of delinquency records, withholding of library cards, and penalizing in general." (Ref. 20)

The results of such efforts to improve the public relations and the image of the public library have borne fruit. The single Amnesty Day of the Chicago Public Library, for example, had the follwing effect:

> The amount of good will and good public relations generated by the Day of Amnesty was incalculable. Personal testimonials, letters, editorials, and nation-wide publicity testified to the success of the day. (Ref. 6)

The American School in Sao Paulo, Brazil, after a year without fines, concluded that "This has succeeded in substituting good will for a major source of irritation for both librarians and students." (Ref. 22) The Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Library, after an academic year with a no-fine student-faculty common loan policy, reported that "Most students and faculty seem to be satisfied with the new loan policy." (Ref. 27) The Dakcta County Library System, which began without fines, then instituted fines after three years, and then removed fines two years later, reported that "The immediate reaction was an almost astounding good-will reaction from our patrons. ... In the long run, we feel the public accepts fines as chiefly punitive and does not understand the motives behind them." (Ref. 49)

The Dedham Public Library, following a 14-month experiment in abolishing all overdue fines, reported that "Positive advantages have been happy public relations and the elimination of a petty and punitive atmosphere." (Ref. 29) In another article the same library reported, "Public reaction has been one of surprise, followed quickly by pleasurable relief." (Ref. 25)

The Coalinga District Library droppedfines in 1967, and in 1970 reported the public reaction as follows:

> Public reaction to a fine-free system has been very good. Most patrons feel we are performing a real service to them and do not feel we fit into the government agency type known for its policy of "harassment." Indeed, many patrons have complimented us on our policy of no fines, commenting that more service agencies should be so oriented. (Ref. 48)

The Vigo County Library performed a user-study of patron opinions during the first month of its no-fine policy, via questionnaire, with the following results:

Strongly agree	156
Mildly agree	54
No opinion	7
Mildly disapprove	44
Strongly disapprove	54
Total	315

The Alameda County Library was also going to perform a user-study of patron attitudes during the Spring of 1971, and had developed a three-page questionnaire that went through a number of revisions at that time. However, the study was never carried out, due to the short staffing, heavy workload, and other more pressing priority demands experienced by the Administrative group at Library Headquarters.

As with most controversial suggestions, the professional literature reveals a small but adamant minority of libraries who are convinced that a no-fines policy is not good for public relations. The Virginia Beach Public Library tried a fine-free policy for two months, and experienced good public relations at first, which changed to ill will when their clientele began not to return their books, as follows:

> Delight and amazement was exhibited by patrons and staff alike during the first weeks of the trial period. Patrons were happy that they no longer had to pay (with the exception of some who insisted upon paying fines), the children especially. Circulation staff members were pleased with no-fines as it was not necessary for them to play the part of the witch and demand fine money from "innocent" patrons. (Ref. 9)

But then the situation changed at Virginia Beach, and overdues increased greatly.

> We learned that without fines, many felt no need to return books on the date indicated. Popular fiction, particularly, was never returned on time. Accordingly much ill will was generated among these patrons desiring these titles. (Ref. 9)

A similarly negative experience is reported by the Morrison-Reeves Public Library in Richmond, Indiana, which dropped a six-month fine-free trial operation after only 3½ months of what they called "a disaster." Their negative public relations experiences, and the decisions resulting from them, were described as follows:

> The library, blessed with an appreciative clientele earned by both good service and good communication, didn't even reap any public relations kudos! When we went back to fines, there were no repercussions; no expressions of regret on the part of patrons. Apparently we have some real "squares" among our patrons--people who believe that having rules and abiding by them or paying the consequences is, on the whole, a salutary idea! In general we will go back to the image of rules, law and order, even to prosecution, if this becomes necessary. (Ref. 15)

The law-and-order theme for public relations is also sounded by the Head Librarian of the Roswell Public Library in New Mexico, who reports "fantastic" results using a postcard overdue notice which carries a Police Department letterhead and threatens police action against the offending patron, although "The Police Department was assured that we did not expect them to follow up on the card." The librarian reports as follows on the public's reaction to the threat of police action:

> We had worried that we might "lose friends" through this project, but we find that instead we are gaining some. People come and apologize; they seem to respect us more for being able to "get tough" enough to bring the police in. (Ref. 24)

Since public relations are dependent upon the particular "public" in question, perhaps the best way to resolve this particular controversy, as far as the operation of the Alameda County Library System is concerned, is to be guided by the two years of actual experience the library has had without fines. The staff of the Alameda County Library who were interviewed for the present study came to the following conclusions as a result of their experience with the no-fines policy:

1. The library staff is less defensive toward patrons, because there are fewer complaints.
2. Patrons are for the most part pleased and some are still surprised about not having to pay fines.
3. Patrons who were skeptical over the success of the no-fines policy rarely say much about it any more, but some seem to have a "wait-and-see" attitude. These latter are a very small percentage of the patrons.
4. In summary, public relations are more positive, friendly, and comfortable. (Ref. 76) The Fremont Main Lead Clerk wrote: "For public relations purposes the abolition of fines has been a God-send this past year." (Ref. 72)

b. <u>Responsibility should be placed on the borrowers to return their books on time for the right reasons--the needs of others--rather than from the fear of penalties</u>.

One of the reasons that was frequently cited for charging fines (see Section III.A.) was that fines help to educate the borrowers, especially the younger ones, to a greater sense of responsibility for the rights of others, for public property, and for abiding by rules and regulations. Upon careful examination of this point, however, many public librarians have come to the conclusion that they can do a better job in this regard <u>without</u> fines.

The view that forgiveness of fines will only lead to greater delinquency among patrons is put well by two Westchester County librarians. In discussing the pros and cons of Amnesty Days, the Yonkers librarian said, "I don't believe in it because it encourages delinquent borrowers." (Ref. 6) The Scarsdale librarian agreed, pointing out that "There is no amnesty in Scarsdale. The rule is 5 cents per day on everything; the rule is firm with positively no adjustment ... I do not believe in amnesty; do it once and the delinquent patron is apt to think he can get away with it again sometime

and thereby hold off on returning overdues." (Ref. 6)

The Dedham Public Library, in its report on a 14-month experiment in abolishing all overdue fines, described a frequent patron complaint and their succinct response:

> Even after "no fines" had been in effect for a month or more, one mother felt us to be overly permissive when she asked, "How do you expect us to teach them responsibility if you don't enforce fines?" "By placing the responsibility where it rightfully belongs," was the reply. (Ref. 25)

A similar situation was described by a Baltimore newspaper columnist who received an irate letter about the Enoch Pratt Library's experiment with no fines for children:

> You are condoning the irresponsibility that the thinking citizen is so concerned about and has been since the beginning of society. Is there some magic time during our growth to adulthood when we all at once become responsible or do we learn responsibility in the same manner as other things--little by little and from the beginning of our lives? If the books are not returned, then it is about time we do with the children what we do with the adults--for each privilege there is a responsibility attached; if the responsibility is not performed, remove the privilege. We need more police, the court dockets are loaded; the jails are full; and you people are saying "Go ahead, do as you please." Permissiveness never has worked. (Ref. 19)

But the Baltimore reporter responded, "They call it a second chance; and if you're going to deny a kid that much, count me out." (Ref. 19)

In commenting on the Enoch Pratt experiment, the Associate Editor of the School Library Journal feels as follows concerning the use of fines to teach responsibility:

> The use of fines in the name of teaching "responsibility" is a classic case of hypocrisy. Reading over the memos and reports, I was jolted time and time again by the numerous references to "delinquent" borrowers, an unnecessarily if unconsciously damaging term for an absent-minded user. There really is a difference between returning a book late and not returning it at all ... The futility of the effort and our concept of "educating" children to be prompt becomes clearest when we realize (as the study discloses) that it is adult borrowers of children's books who are the worst offenders. (Ref. 19)

One answer given by the Alameda County Library staff members who were interviewed for this study, to the patron complaint that "You're not teaching proper responsibility," is to tell the patron the simple fact that "More overdue books are being returned now than before." The Fremont Main Lead Clerk provided this excellent response in her interview:

> The new system encourages the children to use more independent responsibility, and to use the library more fully, in a very positive way. Responsibility is not really encouraged by the use of threats. We try to reinforce this at the circulation desk, by pointing out that late books deprive others of their use, and at the time of borrowing, we mention that we hope they will return the books on time because others may be waiting for them, and acknowledging that no fines are charged.
>
> This puts the responsibility on the individual, where it belongs. We say that "It's up to you now, as there's no penalty as before, but the reason the due date is in the book is that we need it back and expect you to bring it back because others may want to use it after you.

> This makes the situation a real teaching opportunity. Before, it was the threat of cost to himself or his parents that was the incentive to return the book; now it's that he ought to return it because others need it, the right reasons for doing it. This teaches true responsibility to the individual.(Ref.75)

A couple of libraries have reported little or no success with this approach, however. The Virginia Beach Public Library, which tried a no-fine policy for two months but abandoned it, said that "The arguments that others were waiting for the title or that their attitude was jeopardizing the entire program elicited no reaction at all." (Ref. 9) The Morrisson-Reeves Public Library in Richmond, Indiana, which abandoned a no-fines experiment after only 3½ months of its planned six-month duration, commented as follows:

> It may be that a no-fine policy might have worked in another era of more respect for law and order. Conversely, we may have come to a period when thoughtful people are beginning to reject the permissive philosophy and consciously or subconsciously want the strengthening support of authority. We began to get the message that our patrons wanted this institution they supported by their tax dollars to have some rules and to carry them out. (Ref. 15)

Two additional articles support the position of the Alameda County Library staff in a persuasive manner, with the argument that people are more likely to act with responsibility if they are treated like responsible adults. The Andover Public Library, which eliminated overdue fines "with firm conviction," comments as follows:

> Of course, the library wants its material back, but we prefer to appeal to the intelligence of the borrower rather than a fear of punishment. It is our hope that people will act responsibly when treated in a mature manner.(Ref.1)

In a newspaper editorial which approved the decision of the Alameda County Library to abolish fines, the writer concluded with the following remarks:

> And what that says about you and I is that we are singular and proud animals, that fines may not get us but,--when somebody says (in effect) "Hey look. You're a reasonable sort. Take out the book, enjoy it, and get it back as soon as you can so the next guy can enjoy it too"--THAT gets us.
>
> There is ultimately only one way to make a grown-up act like an adult. Treat him like one. (Ref. 54)

Many librarians have commented in the professional literature on the relationship between library fines and an individual's conscience or feelings of guilt. Most of them do not feel that the relationship is appropriate, but they do agree that it does exist in the minds of the patrons. One of the reasons that the Morrisson-Reeves Public Library gave for reinstituting a policy of fines after an experiment of a few months without them was that "At least 90 per cent of the people who came to our circulation desk objected to the no-fine policy; it gave them, they said, a sense of guilt." (Ref. 15) In commenting on the success of their no-fines operation, the Douglas County Librarian assessed the relative proportions differently: "The only objec-

tions we have had are from people with a guilty conscience. They have been far outnumbered by those who appreciate it." (Ref. 51) The Genesee County Librarian, in commenting on their experience without fines, assessed public reaction to the new policy in the following statement:

> Most of the patrons have been pleased with the change. Only a few have objected. There are some people who felt that paying a small fine absolved them from any responsibility for returning books on time--they are unhappy with the change. (Ref. 53)

Some librarians who have abolished fines have actually installed "collection boxes" or "donation boxes" to accommodate the uncomfortable patrons who can no longer pay fines for their overdue books. The Andover Public Library announced that "A collection box will be at the circulation desk for those who feel that fine-paying will assuage their consciences." (Ref. 1) The interviewees of the Alameda County Library staff reported that many patrons, some in every branch except the Bookmobile, have donated money in lieu of paying fines. Some Alameda County branches would like to have a "Donation Jar" or box for those patrons who like to assuage their guilt feelings by donating to the "Book Fund." (Ref. 76)

There are other librarians, however, who do not permit their patrons to pay pseudo-fines or donations, once their libraries have decided to eliminate fines, because these librarians want to get their books back for the right reasons, and do not want to permit offenders to "pay their way out." The Anoka County Librarian looks at it in this way:

> Fines are not a moral question. They have nothing to do with the just cause of forcing people to return public property. ... Every time (which is not often) I must, in the course of my work, become authoritatively demanding with a hard-core delinquent patron, I rejoice inwardly that my tone is not affected by any monetary consideration. ...
>
> We fineless librarians are free from those somewhat repulsive characters who bear their books in, with coins piled on top, like a devotional offering to some altar, and jokingly claim that they support the library with their conscientious overdue payments. ... The explanation (is) given them that only future prompt return of books, not money, will assuage guilt pangs. (Ref. 5)

Similarly, the Dakota County Librarian, who also has a no-fines policy, made the following observation:

> Frequently a patron returning overdue books offers to pay something anyway and we respond, "No, thank you, we'd rather have the books back earlier than your money." (Ref. 49)

In summary, the librarian of the Daniel Boone Regional Library in Columbia, Missouri, wrote as follows about the no-fines policy they have adopted:

> We feel that we have removed one psychological advantage favoring the patron: under a fine system, the patron often assumes the attitude that he can pay his way out. By not permitting him this escape clause, we can adopt a more realistic approach in securing the return of materials. (Ref. 50)

c. Fines are inconsistent with the concept of the "free public library."

Whenever the public library considers instituting monetary charges of any kind on its clientele, there is usually some controversy over the propriety of doing so. For example, the Dakota-Scott Regional Library in Minnesota began with citizens petitioning the county boards to be taxed to establish and maintain a library, but "from the beginning, the library board felt it was unfair to add 'fine' costs to the tax burden." (Ref. 49)

In a two-month trial of a fine-free system, the Virginia Beach Public Library began with "a belief that a free public library system should be just that -- free." Despite a very discouraging trial period that led the library to reinstate fines, the staff still retained that basic principle in its library philosophy: "We still believe that a free public library should be free. We still continue to work with the problem of fines. We shall still attempt experiments to improve the fine situation." (Ref. 9)

The Rutherford Public Library in New Jersey summarizes both sides of the argument in this fashion:

> Every now and then someone comes into our library and in an offended tone asks how we can call ourselves a Free Public Library and still charge fines on overdue books and fees for services (reserves, interlibrary loans, non-resident fees, etc.). We point out that the highways are free too, but that those who break rules are fined. The library is indeed free. One can borrow books all his lifetime and never pay a cent, but if he wishes special treatment he must expect to pay for services. (Ref. 42)

6. Reduced costs of library operations.

Regardless of the pros and cons surrounding any decision made by a library in terms of the effects on its collection, its services, its patrons, and its role, the "price tag" must also be assessed and then evaluated in terms of the actual or anticipated benefits to be derived.

a. The costs of collecting and accounting for the revenue received from fines are greater than the revenue itself.

This cost comparison is the one most frequently reported in the professional literature, but this writer questions its usefulness, regardless of the results of the comparison. If it is felt that the balance sheet between the collecting costs and the revenue must show a "profit," or at least "break even," then all of the other reasons usually cited for having a system of fines are somewhat irrelevant, with the cost comparison actually governing the final decision as to whether to retain or eliminate fines. Such a discussion could degenerate to the point where the major concern would be the optimum level of fines that would produce the most favorable balance sheet. When fines are considered primarily as an income-producing device, the many foregoing

considerations of professional librarianship that should be forming the central issues are neglected.

The following three libraries that advocate a fine-free system feel that the costs of collecting the money are greater than the amount of money collected, but any cost studies they may have performed were not noted in the literature search:

Andover Public Library: "It costs more to collect fines than money received, and elimination of fines means improved service." (Ref. 1)

Douglas County Library: "The County Librarian feels that facts have shown it is less expensive to run a library on a no-fine basis. She said some people believe that fines bring in a great deal of money to a library, but actually the handling of public monies, such as fines, can be a very expensive thing in the long run."(Ref.55)

Sheffield City Libraries: "I am quite sure that the cost involved in collecting fines wipes out all the income." (Ref. 45)

However, there are some fine-free libraries that report having done studies which prove the point that it costs more to collect the money than the amount of money that is collected:

Coalinga District Library: "The first reason for dropping fines was obviously financial in nature. It cost us more to process fines than revenues received."(Ref.48) "In 1966, the library spent $2,501 to collect $1,091 in fines."(Ref.17)

Dakota County Library: "Studies were done which indicated that keeping track of these fines, billing for unpaid fines, etc., was requiring the services of a full-time clerk and that the library was collecting much less than her salary per year." (Ref. 49)

Daniel Boone Regional Library: "One of the reasons for eliminating fines was the fact that the cost of collecting and accounting for fine money far exceeded the amount of money so collected." (Ref. 50)

Dedham Public Library: The Library Trustees and the Finance Committee "realized the cost of maintaining an effective fine system proved to be more costly than the revenue it produced for the town's general fund." (Ref. 25)

The Virginia Beach Public Library had a very disappointing two-month trial period without fines. Perhaps as a result of not having performed a cost study, the library received "pressure from the city's Finance Department wanting to know why our monthly revenue statements were drastically lower. ... This led to a realization that the Department needed the fine money as revenue." (Ref. 9)

The fact is, however, that fines account for only a small percentage of the average public library's income. For the 1970-71 fiscal year, the Alameda County Library System estimated its total tax revenue at $1,865,104, as against $45,000 from fines, amounting to about 2½ per cent of its total income. (Ref. 60)

The Associate Editor of the School Library Journal raises the question as to whether the public library really has a moral right to keep the income it collects from fines:

> Like big business, libraries using the practice to remain solvent are pass-

> ing on the price to the consumer. This is questionable for a public service agency--especially since the main target, the user who can least afford the increase, makes library practice seem even more like the private industry game. (Ref. 19)

Many libraries do not themselves retain the fine money as library revenue, but turn it over instead to the general fund of their governmental jurisdiction. (Ref.41) However, this arrangement can result in a kind of conflict-of-interest situation, wherein the library staff can become somewhat disinterested in collecting fines when they know the library cannot keep the revenue, even though revenue is not the primary reason for having the fines. (Ref. 4) With the discontinuance of fines, of course, such problems do not arise.

One reason for the high cost of collecting fines, in comparison to the amount collected, is suggested by the Douglas County Library, which reported that "When the matter of fines was brought up for discussion by the Library Board, the banker on it remarked that it was never economic to collect money in small quantities." (Ref. 51) The Anoka County Library identified the same factor: "It is too costly in terms of labor power to deal with small sums of money." (Ref. 5)

A central cost element in dealing with money that is collected is the very process of counting and recording it. The Douglas County Librarian reports as follows:

> In one large library, the branch librarian counts the money each day; when it is sent to the main library she counts it in the presence of the messenger who evidently then counts it in the presence of the person to whom he delivers it. I have no idea how many times it is counted, but with today's salaries each minute is costly. (Ref. 51)

The Sheffield City Librarian identified other duties that are required in handling the money that has been collected:

> Consider the staff time involved taking fines, giving change, counting the fines daily and weekly, taking them to the bank, keeping detailed records to keep the auditors happy--time which could be used doing something more closely connected with librarianship. (Ref. 45)

The Lead Clerk at the Fremont Main Branch of the Alameda County Library System described the procedures she had to follow in the days before fines were abolished:

> You had to bank the fine money every day. Every evening you had to tally it all up, because you didn't want to leave any money in the cash register. You would leave it in the safe overnight, then first thing in the morning you would make out the bank deposit slip and take the money to the bank to deposit. Transportation costs were reimbursable from the library.(Ref.75)

In a report by the Information Programs Coordinator on a "Time study on fines" in February, 1970, the fine-related duties were described as follows:

> The largest time blocks were spent on processing second notices (which would be eliminated if fines were discontinued); counting the money at the end of the day; and counting the money for the bank and the actual banking

> of it. The rest of the transactions were of very short duration, which interrupted other clerical duties, and made for loss of time getting back to the clerk's original task. (Ref. 58)

The Alameda County Library System did a much more thorough and detailed cost study than any of those reported in the professional literature, prior to recommending the elimination of fines for overdue books. The original presentation of that recommendation, contained in a study prepared by the Administrative Assistant (Ref. 59), discusses the time study that was performed in order to furnish fundamental information for the proposal:

> The branch clerical work involved in maintaining accurate records, collecting, and accounting for fines was the subject of a time study in February, 1970. The study produced evidence that 15% of every branch library clerk's time is spent on fine-related activities. (Ref. 59)

Using this data as the basis for further computations, the proposal then identified a key point to be resolved: "The question now remains, 'If fines are eliminated, would it enable the Library to reduce its budget request enough to compensate for the loss of revenue?'" (Ref. 59)

In the ensuing "Policy Matter No. 1" that was then prepared in March, 1970, for the consideration of the Board of Supervisors, a detailed cost analysis led to the estimate that it would cost the library $95,409 to collect an estimated $45,000 in fines for the coming 1970/71 fiscal year. This would have meant an increase in the tax rate of 0.7 cents to provide the difference of $50,409 that it would cost just to collect those fines. (Ref. 60)

In June, 1970, further calculations had been made, and the proposal was amended to show that $99,441 would have had to have been spent to collect the estimated $45,000 in fines. (Ref. 61a) When the Board of Supervisors voted to accept the proposal to eliminate fines for overdue materials, a total of $54,441 was thus saved from the library budget for the fiscal year 1970/71 alone. Furthermore, as the June, 1970, proposal pointed out, "A most important result of a 'no-fines' policy would be a lessening of the need for increasing clerical staff as the library grows." (Ref. 61a) Thus, in each following year, with ever-increasing circulation in the library system, the cost savings have been even greater.

b. Manpower reductions or reassignments are possible when fines are eliminated.

The question of whether manpower will be saved when fines are eliminated naturally depends on the degree of success of the no-fines policy when it is in operation. Those libraries which had unhappy trial experiments without fines actually experienced manpower increases as a result. Both the Richmond, Indiana, (Ref. 15) and Virginia Beach (Ref. 9) Public Libraries reported that their manpower needs "skyrocketed" when

their library patrons took advantage of the new policy and did not return books on time, thereby forcing an increase in the number of overdue notices to be sent out. However, all those libraries that reported cost reductions in the previous section of this report were primarily reporting savings of manpower, since most of the expense of collecting fines is in labor costs.

As mentioned in the preceding section, the time study that was performed in the Alameda County Library in February, 1970, "produced evidence that 15% of every branch library clerk's time is spent on fine-related activities." (Ref. 59) The original presentation recommending the elimination of fines also predicted that one benefit would be that "The circulation desk work could be scheduled and supervised by a full-time clerk who would not need to be present at all times to handle fines problems," so "the Library could ... utilize the full-time experienced clerks behind-the-scenes, performing more complex branch clerical work." (Ref. 59)

In assessing the cost effects of a fine-free system on the 1970/71 preliminary budget request, it was asserted that "The clerical workload in the branches would be reduced," and the library would not need to add the three full-time clerks and related capital equipment that had been requested by the branches to accommodate increases in workload. Altogether the savings in Salaries & Fringe Benefits (as a result of abolishing fines) were estimated at $85,596 just for the 1970/71 fiscal year alone. (Ref. 60)

The fact that manpower reductions were actually realized in subsequent practice, after the Board of Supervisors approved the no-fines proposal, was borne out by the Fremont Main Lead Clerk, who said of her prior experience at the Irvington Branch Library: "There was a cut-back in staff following the abolition of fines. Irvington had a clerical staff of three that was cut back to 1½ because of this." (Ref. 75)

c. <u>The classification level of staff members at the circulation desk can be reduced, in a fine-free operation</u>.

During the days when the Alameda County Library System had a conventional system involving fines for overdue books, all the circulation desk work was performed by full-time Clerks. The original presentation to eliminate fines included the following economy in staffing that could be achieved if fines were no longer collected:

> The Library could take advantage of part-time student help at the circulation desk and utilize the full-time experienced clerks behind-the-scenes, performing more complex branch clerical work. (Ref. 59)

This practice was implemented following the Board of Supervisors' approval of the no-fines policy, and most branch libraries in the Alameda County Library System now have Library Aides manning the circulation desk instead of Clerks. This results in a

savings of salaries and fringe benefits because of the higher classification level and fringe benefits of the Clerks.

The staff members who were interviewed for this study have pointed out some improvements which they feel are needed to make this staffing change work more effectively, as follows:

1. The Library Aides at the circulation desk need more training in handling questions from the variety of patrons who use the library, since the Aides now are often the primary point of contact, in person or by telephone, between the patron and the library.
2. The Civil Service examination for Aides is still based on the formerly primary task of shelving books, so the examination should be up-dated to reflect their new duties.
3. The classification and salary levels of Aides should be increased to bring them closer to those enjoyed by the Clerks, since they perform many of the same duties as the Clerks.
4. Despite these economies in staffing and improvements in procedures, the branches feel the workloads are much too heavy for the Aides, and should be relieved by additional staffing. The branch personnel say they couldn't survive without the help they receive from volunteers and from special employment programs like the NYC. (Ref. 76)

d. <u>The work flow becomes smoother and more efficient when the necessity is removed for immediate examination of every book that is being returned.</u>

As pointed out in the original presentation to eliminate fines in the Alameda County Library System, a clerk in a fining operation cannot plan her own time but is at the mercy of the system:

> The most significant aspect of the time spent on fines (15% of every branch library clerk's time) is its inflexibility. Clerks must interrupt whatever they are doing to attend to books being checked in (to check date due, collect fines, and record cash) each time patrons return library materials. This is continual during open hours. (Ref. 59)

This factor of continual interruption, which naturally lowers the efficiency of the worker, was also identified in the time study on fine-related duties that was performed in February, 1970:

> The rest of the transactions (after processing overdue notices, counting the money, and banking the money) were of very short duration, which interrupted other clerical duties, and made for loss of time getting back to the clerk's original task. (Ref. 58)

These descriptions were borne out by the Fremont Main Lead Clerk, who described the former procedures under fines as follows:

> Formerly, a watchdog attitude was necessary. You would grab the books being returned at the desk in order to see if they were overdue. If they were, this would save you a lot of work as well as getting the fine money on the spot. Otherwise, it would require reading the film, typing and filing the notices, etc. (Ref. 75)

Accordingly, one of the advantages of a no-fine operation that was foreseen in

the original presentation for eliminating fines was that "Books being returned need not be checked in immediately, but could be set aside to be handled more efficiently." (Ref. 59)

e. Fewer overdue notices are required in a fine-free procedure, resulting in cost savings in supplies and postage as well as manpower.

One of the benefits that would come to the Alameda County Library System if fines were to be abolished was described as follows in the original presentation:

> The present overdue procedure could be cut in half because the timing of the notices would not be so important if the patron is not charged fines. Presently, four notices are processed for overdue materials: first, second, third, and the final letter. Notices are typed once, in multiple copies, and are mailed first class. These could be reduced to a postcard reminder, sent about three weeks after the book is due, and the final letter which is a bill for costs. The timing of reading film for overdue materials would also be less significant with no fines involved. ... Office supply costs would be reduced. With fewer records required, fewer forms would be needed. Cutting the number of notices in half would cut mailing costs. (Ref. 59)

The time study on fine-related procedures in the Alameda County Library that was performed in February, 1970, showed that one of the largest blocks of time was "spent on processing second notices, which would be eliminated if fines were discontinued." (Ref. 58) In the memorandum "Proposal to Think About Abolishing Fines," the time saved by eliminating the two extra overdue notices was estimated at 32 per cent of a full-time clerk in each branch. This saving was calculated to be $20,317.44 in salaries alone for 1970 (using the minimum Clerk II salary), without even including the costs of fringe benefits or supplies. (Ref. 57)

The decision by the Alameda County Library to reduce the number of overdue notices as an economy move is supported by a number of studies that have assessed the relative cost-effectiveness of successive overdue notices sent to borrowers. In a detailed cost analysis performed for the University of Michigan Library, which also had three notices and a final bill (and fines), the following evidence was produced:

> The comparative information on the different notices indicates that the second notices entail 1/4 of the cost while producing less than 1/7 of the book returns; and the third notices entail 1/6 of the cost while producing 1/50 of the book returns. This low return for the dollar ... led to the recommendation that the third notice certainly should be eliminated and that the second notice should be considered for elimination. (Ref. 4)

Going even further in this direction, some public librarians question whether overdue notices should be sent out at all. A study of fines, fees, and overdues in 60 small New Jersey public libraries puts the following questions:

> How far need librarians go to retrieve books, records, and other materials which negligent borrowers have failed to return or renew at the end of the loan period? Does the end result justify the means? Does it pay to go

> to all the trouble and expense of sending out overdue notices? Why try to retrieve anything? Would it not be better to forego all notices and write the materials off as lost at the end of the year? (Ref. 42)

The New Jersey survey did not provide cost data to support that point of view, but in the following year, the Indianapolis Public Library set out to provide cost figures to illuminate the issue. They performed an experiment "in order to equate the value of materials recovered with the cost of materials and labor expended in recovering them, and to determine what proportion of materials would be permanently lost if delinquent borrowers were not reminded of their obligation to return materials."(Ref. 40)

In the Indianapolis experiment, no overdue notices were sent for materials borrowed during a single week for three consecutive months. Eighteen months later, an accounting was made of the materials which were still unreturned. It was found that 1.9 per cent of the items that circulated during those three weeks had not been returned and were valued at $382.51; these items were borrowed by 88 patrons, or 1.8 per cent of the total library clientele. The cost of labor to maintain records for and send notices of overdue materials for three weeks was estimated to be $338.16, and the costs of printing and mailing the overdue forms at $6.77, totalling $344.93 that would have been expended in the effort to recover materials valued at $382.51.

The Indianapolis study report also presented the details of a similar experiment that had been performed by the Rochester (N.Y.) Public Library, and came to the following conclusion:

> If the figures resulting from the studies by the Indianapolis Public Library and the Rochester Public Library are representative, obviously the complicated procedures of maintaining overdue records and sending notices cannot be justified solely upon a monetary basis. (Ref. 40)

Most libraries have not gone so far as to eliminate overdue notices entirely, however, and it is not recommended here. The recommendation in the original presentation to the Board of Supervisors to eliminate fines, and also in the memorandum "Proposal to Think About Abolishing Fines," both advocating a procedure consisting of one overdue notice and a final bill, is the most reasonable and responsible approach to the question, and is in agreement with the prevailing practice of most of the libraries who have abolished fines.

f. A fine-free operation can produce reductions in the costs of equipment and space that would otherwise be needed.

Reductions in equipment costs might be reflected in various ledger accounts, such as equipment maintenance, equipment rental, and capital equipment purchases. Reductions in space needs are more subtly realized, but they are nevertheless real, and have an impact on costs, efficiency, and staffing.

One of the central points made in the original presentation to the Board of Supervisors to eliminate fines in the Alameda County Library System was that registration files could more easily be dispensed with in a fine-free system than otherwise:

> Public relations dictates that fines records be maintained scrupulously, for patrons become incensed at any public agency which, they feel, has treated them unfairly. The result, in library branches, is an elaborate "account record" on each patron, called the registration file. ... Attached to the application are all records on outstanding fines, books not returned, renewals of library cards, etc.
>
> All of the information contained in the registration file, with the exception of parental approval for children's use of the library, is available in the branch in another form. ... Even with this information available, though not as accessible, the library clerks strongly resisted eliminating registration files because "it helps us serve patrons better by having accurate and up-to-date information on the status of their account with the library." This feeling is born of the daily confrontations with irate patrons who discuss the fines they owe and challenge the accuracy of the records.
>
> Because of budget limitations in staffing, equipment, and space, the library has decided to eliminate all adult registration files and maintain only the juvenile files, which contain the parental consent information. Even without a complete registration file, if fines are collected, each branch must maintain a "delinquent patrons" file. (Ref. 59)

Although the Alameda County Library System was going to abolish the adult registration files anyway for budgetary reasons, these files "could be abolished more easily when fines were discontinued, because the practice of attaching overdue and fine notices to the cards could then also be discontinued," as confirmed by the Fremont Main Lead Clerk in her interview. She added that "We still have registration files for children, because they forget their cards more often, since they don't have wallets to carry them around in like adults do, or they may have lost them, and this way the registration card can be used in the photocharging machine in lieu of the library card." (Ref. 75)

The Alameda County Library System was following advanced library practice when it made the decision to reduce its registration files so drastically. The Wheeler and Goldhor textbook made the following observations in 1962:

> Various simplifications of borrower registration have been devised, and some libraries (Queens Borough, N.Y.; Stockton, Calif.; and Wayne County, Mich., among others) have eliminated registration. ... Unreturned books have not increased significantly as a percentage of total circulation, and economies have been realized in supplies and elimination of paperwork, along with favorable public reaction. With transaction-card charging on the increase (Note: this is the method used by the Alameda County Library System), borrower registration is evidently on the way out, except in the small libraries. The first principle of modern circulation routines is that readers shall find it easy to qualify for borrowing books. (Ref. 47)

There are some instances, of course, when the registration files would have come in handy, but no one in the Alameda County Library seriously suggests reinstating them, because of the time that would have to be spent in creating them, the space

they would consume, and the equipment money they would require for their housing. The Fremont Main Lead Clerk identified the instances when the files are missed:

> The only times we miss the adult registration card files now are (1) when the patron has changed his address from the one on his card, (2) when the patron needs a replacement card typed for the one he has lost, and (3) the lack of his phone number when you want to call him to straighten out some circulation matter. Some transactions are easier to handle by phone than by mail. The new reader-printers that have been requested will solve the problem, as they will print out a picture of the library card, which has the phone number on it. Many people are not in the telephone book, and it is another time-consuming task to check it all the time. In general, though, we don't miss the adult registration files a great deal. (Ref. 75)

In addition to the registration files, there are cost savings from other equipment that is no longer necessary when fines have been eliminated. Again quoting from the interview with the Fremont Main Lead Clerk:

> We have eliminated half our drawers in the Registration File. We no longer need a cash register. We have also eliminated the microfilm reader, plus the typewriter that had to be alongside the reader; this typewriter was kept busy almost full-time with fines-related work. (Ref. 75)

The Sheffield City Librarian identified similar kinds of equipment savings:

> Then there is the equipment to be provided and maintained: cash drawers, fines-boxes, fine-guides, safes, stationery. We could dispense with most of such equipment if fines were to be abolished. (Ref. 45)

On the matter of space savings resulting from a fine-free operation, the Fremont Main Lead Clerk furnished the following information in her interview:

> The size of the circulation desk in branch libraries can now be smaller, with fewer people behind the desk and fewer patrons requiring handling at the desk. In Fremont Main's case I don't see how we could have handled fine collection along with our other heavy circulation duties. ... More staff would not have solved the problem either; only so many people can work efficiently behind the circulation desk at one time.
>
> The microfilm reader, a typewriter, and the person working on fines and overdues all had to be in a room that was off by itself. The space required for scanning the film and typing the notices had to be private for concentration, a quiet space, and a space with controlled lighting to improve the film images. (Refs. 72, 75)

The Alameda County Library System, in its presentation of "Policy Matter No. 1" to the Board of Supervisors in the Spring of 1970, estimated the following supplies and equipment dollar savings from the 1970/71 budget request that would result from eliminating fines:

Office Expense:	$ 3,427	
Equipment Maintenance:	56	
Equipment Rentals:	1,438	
	$ 4,921	Total Services and Supplies
	4,892	Capital Equipment
	$ 9,813	Total Supplies & Equipment Savings 1970/71

(Ref. 60)

g. Significant cost savings can be realized from the centralization of overdues operations when fines are eliminated.

The original presentation to the Board of Supervisors to eliminate fines in the Alameda County Library System identified the following benefits (among others) that would then be possible:

> Without fines, the overdue procedure for all the branches could be centralized in one location, ... because the necessity of immediate access to overdue records would be eliminated when the fines are removed. The clerical staff at the branches could be cut as no overdue procedures would be done there. ... Eliminating fines and centralizing overdues would reduce equipment costs by requiring fewer typewriters, microfilm readers, and catalog drawers for registration files. (Ref. 59)

A description of the centralization of the overdues operations, and the ever-increasing benefits it brings to the Alameda County Library System, is provided in Chapter II of the present study.

D. Possible reinstatement of fines.

Before coming to a final evaluation of the no-fine policy adopted by the Alameda County Library System, it is necessary not only to have examined the reasons for the policy and how they have worked out in practice, but also the practicability of returning to the former policy in the event the new one is found wanting. The various facets of the question will be discussed in the same order as the preceding sections that dealt with the effects of abolishing fines.

1. Use of the library.

a. Staff time. The Alameda County Library staff who were interviewed for this study believe that reinstatement of fines would have the following effects on staffing:

(1) The staff would collapse -- too much added paperwork.
(2) The library system would need triple the staff.
(3) A greater bottleneck would result at the circulation desk. (Ref. 76)

The Fremont Main Lead Clerk added the following details:

> In Fremont Main's case I don't see how we could have handled fine collection along with our other heavy circulation duties. The sheer volume of work here inhibits adding any other functions to the circulation work. The public tends to become impatient of standing in line. More staff would not have solved the problem either; only so many people can work efficiently behind the circulation desk at one time.(Ref.72)

b. Circulation. The Alameda County Library staff predict that reinstituting fines would cause "some decline in circulation, especially children's." (Ref. 76)

2. The collection.

a. Promptness of return of library materials. The Dakota County Library System began without fines, but added them three years later "when the young, burdened library felt a tremendous need to hurry the return of books more nearly on the due date." How-

ever, two years later, a study "indicated that the fines had not appreciably hurried the return of the books." In 1967 the library returned to a no-fine policy, and at the end of 1969 reported that "continuing studies indicated no slow-down in the return of books." (Ref. 49)

b. Long-overdue books. With the return of the system that puts ever-increasing fines on overdue books the longer they are kept out, the Alameda County Library staff says that it would expect "increased theft and loss of books." (Ref. 76)

3. The nature of the clientele. A return to fines would be accompanied by the financial barriers to library use that were formerly observed to exist with respect to the disadvantaged members and the children of the community, both of whom are the most adversely affected by having to pay library fines.

4. Fairness to patrons. Reinstituting fines would most likely bring a return of the former situations wherein the patrons were not treated equitably for a variety of reasons.

5. The library's image and role. The Alameda County Library staff predicts that a reinstatement of fines would have an "abysmal" effect on public relations, and that the result would be a "total disaster." They point out that the additional workload that would be created in collecting fines and keeping records would result in less service and a poorer quality of service to the public. (Ref. 76) The Fremont Main Lead Clerk summed it up by saying: "It is really impossible to reinstate the old system, especially in view of the harmful effects on public relations that would follow." (Ref. 75)

6. Costs.

a. Revenue from fines. Most of the studies that have been done, including those by the Alameda County Library staff, indicate that the revenue gained from fines is less than the expense of collecting, recording, and accounting for it. Therefore, reinstituting a system of fines would most likely result in a financial loss to the taxpayer.

b. Manpower. Each branch library would need to have its clerical staff augmented if fines were reinstituted, not only to the levels requested at the time fines were eliminated, but to an even higher level to accommodate the increased circulation that the Library has enjoyed during the ensuing two years.

c. Classification level. There would have to be a higher ratio of full-time Clerks to Library Aides in every branch, if fines were reinstated, due to the need for greater staff continuity and responsibility when public funds are being collected.

d. Work flow efficiency. A return to fines would also bring with it a return to the undesirable situation wherein every book being returned has to be examined for

its due date immediately upon receipt, thereby creating continual interruptions for the staff.

e. Supplies and postage. If fines were to be reinstituted, the costs of supplies, forms, and postage would increase at the same time, because of the greater number of overdue notices that are required when the fines on overdue books keep mounting the longer the books are kept out.

f. Equipment and space. A return to fines would require the purchase of cash registers, microfilm readers, typewriters, etc., for every branch library, as well as registration card files. As for space, not only would the quiet area for concentration need to be reinstituted for the fines-related work, but, as the Fremont Main Lead Clerk pointed out, "The costs for reinstating fines would not be just the personnel, but a question of space--where would the extra people go? Not only that, but the files would take up room we don't have, and would result in even more crowding behind the circulation desk than we now have, with people trying to use those files."(Ref.75)

g. Centralized overdues operations. The benefits derived from centralizing the overdues operations could not be achieved if fines were in effect. The original presentation to the Board of Supervisors explained the reasons as follows:

> If the Library were to centralize overdues and retain fines, there would not be enough savings to warrant the change, primarily because fines would add urgency to the timing of all information to be transmitted between the center and the branches, and because the four overdue notices would have to be retained. There would also be added costs when the library staff duplicated files to assure immediate access to information in case of citizen complaint. (Ref. 59)

Additional testimony to the ineffectiveness that could be expected from Central Overdues if fines were reinstated is provided in these two additional thoughts from the Fremont Main Lead Clerk:

> A time-consuming requirement was that the film had to be read twice, once when the overdue notice was sent, and again when the patron would leave the book in the slot or on the counter without waiting around. There was a film reader in each branch library. Today I don't see how Central Overdues could handle that part of it, as that would be a large part of what they would be doing, looking up books that had been returned late, in order to establish the identity of the borrower so that he could be billed. ...
>
> An additional problem in the way of reinstatement of the fines system is that the IBM cards are sent directly to the computer, and are not usable for writing notes to Central Overdues as the paper slips were. In the former system, the paper T-slips were used for recording data on books received, but if fines were reinstated, such information would have to be transcribed onto another new form, which also introduces a new source of error into the operation. The transaction number and the amount due would have to be sent to Central Overdues on the new form. (Ref. 75)

To summarize the answer to the question concerning the possibility of reinstating the former system of fines, the Dedham Public Library, after 14 months without fines, said, "We have no reason for turning back." (Ref. 25) The Daniel Boone Regional Li-

brary put it even more strongly: "Under no circumstances would we consider a return to the old system." (Ref. 50) And finally, in the words of the Fremont Main Lead Clerk, "It is really impossible to reinstate the old system," (Ref. 75) echoing the sentiments of all the Alameda County Library staff who were interviewed for this study.

E. Evaluation of the policy of eliminating fines.

Having examined in the earlier sections of this chapter the purposes of fines, the reasons given for abolishing them, the effects of abolishing them, and the feasibility of reinstating them, it is now time to evaluate the no-fine policy on its merits, its shortcomings, and its experience in action.

Those who may be under the impression that abolishing fines is a brand-new idea will be surprised to learn that it has been around for many years. A major library textbook that was written in 1953 includes the following statement: "A few libraries have eliminated fines for general circulating books. Reports indicate that the action has not resulted in any disturbing effects upon the service of the libraries."(Ref.41)

A number of libraries that have actually lived with a fine-free operation made brief summary statements favoring the policy:

American School, Sao Paulo, Brazil, after one year without fines:
"We hope our letter may encourage other libraries to eliminate fines." (Ref. 22)

Anoka County Library, Minnesota, after two years without fines:
"For two years I have worked happily in a library which has never fined anyone and which suffers no peculiar disabilities as a result; in fact, it is accorded many financial and psychological benefits which those who deal in the business of coin changing can never know. ... I hope my friends in fining libraries, most of whom have a healthy distaste for the whole grubby fining business, will at last dig in their heels and scream." (Ref. 5)

Coalinga District Library, Calif., after three years without fines:
"The new system works far better than the old one." (Ref. 48)

Daniel Boone Regional Library, Columbia, Missouri:
"We have found the no-fine system to be very workable for us. Under no circumstance would we consider a return to the old system." (Ref. 50)

Dedham Public Library, Massachusetts, after 14 months without fines:
"In conclusion, fines can be eliminated." (Ref. 25)

Douglas County Library, Roseburg, Calif., after 17 years without fines:
"Because of its popularity and its advantages, Miss Trimble (County Librarian) sees no change in sight for the no-fine policy at the Douglas County Library."(Ref.55)

Genesee County Libraries, Flint, Michigan, after ½ year without fines:
"We have been well pleased with the results." (Ref. 53)

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Library, Troy, N.Y., after 1 year without fines:
"The Head of the library's Reader Services Division has analyzed the effects of this new system and reports that it is working quite well." (Ref. 27)

Windsor Public Library, Ontario, Canada, after ½ year without fines:
"The new policy has been a rousing success." (Ref. 32)

One of the problems to be faced in making such an evaluation lies in trying to match cost data against services rendered, but this is what makes it more of a professional librarianship decision than a simple bookkeeping decision. As the systems analysts in the University of Michigan study observed, "The most telling problem hindering the analysis was the inability to compare the dollar costs of the overdue and renewal processes to the dollar benefits of better service." (Ref. 4) The Flint (Michigan) Library Director made his cost-benefit evaluation in this way: "Library fines have always been a very minor part of our operating revenue and currently accounts for only 1.3% of our budget. This is a small amount to invest in the hope of significantly increased library use." (Ref. 18)

The Director of the Montclair Public Library, in a Library Journal editorial, summarizes his feelings on the subject as follows:

> The "overdue fine" is a testament to our pettiness and our paranoia. It serves no demonstrable purpose (except to gratify our own punitive appetites). Elimination of fines most often produces a significant reduction in thefts, no appreciable increase in overdues, and a great saving in bookkeeping. But, most important, it removes a major obstacle to an image of "service" rather than "control" as the main function of the library staff. (Ref. 10)

The important fine-free experiment for children's loans that was performed over a two-year period by the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore received this final analysis from the study committee:

> The gains that offset the loss of fine revenue cannot be put down in monetary value. It is particularly important for children who are financially unable to pay fines, or whose parents would pay the fine but refuse to allow the children to borrow books again, to have the opportunity to borrow books without fear. If the Library is to continue to serve inner city residents, the no-fines policy, with some adjustment to make its application more equitable as far as adult borrowers are concerned, should become a permanent part of services to children. (Ref. 19)

The Associate Editor of School Library Journal, who wrote an article on the Enoch Pratt experiment, provides additional comments as follows:

> The recommendation (given above) ... has been accepted and the no-fines policy extended for an indefinite period of time, though with the acknowledgement that the experiment did not result in increased circulation, registration, and library use by children after the first year. The conclusions of the report have been considered valid, despite the fact that, as one library official said, "We did not set up the kind of controls at the outset that would have let us do a more analytical study."
>
> Experimentation doesn't always accord with decisions that should be based on public policy, however, and the conductors of the experiment need hardly feel as apologetic as they do. The result, in internal terms, is not as gloomy as it seems. Considering that there were 45,000 lost books at the beginning of the trial period--really a much more important issue in terms of library costs and policies than simply returning a book late--a 33 percent drop in book losses among the "irresponsible" juvenile population is not to be sneezed at. ...
>
> ... The eloquent plea (from one of the study directors, the Coordinator of

work with children) for a policy that places human above commercial considerations regardless of dubious statistics is much more to the point than all our tallies. This kind of bookkeeping policy, and evaluation in terms of purely internal library considerations, belong to a kind of analysis, divorcing the library from the context of the community, that should have gone by the boards long ago.(Ref.19)

Along somewhat the same lines, the report of the successful 14-month fine-free experiment of the Dedham Public Library concluded with this paragraph:

> In conclusion, fines can be eliminated. Basically it requires viewing your library and your public somewhat differently. It means becoming people-rather than property-oriented. Our community relations have improved greatly and a more satisfactory relationship is maintained inasmuch as our identity as a service agency is more clearly identified since we no longer appear petty and punitive. The elimination of fines, if anything, has stimulated circulation and free use of the entire library. We did not open Pandora's box! We simply gave more than lip service to the right of anyone--child, student, or adult--to use his library without punitive sanctions. (Ref. 25)

The literature search revealed three libraries which disagree with those who advocate a fine-free policy. The Pennsylvania State Library, which is more of an academic research library than a conventional community public library, instituted a system of fines after 225 years without fines. In defense of this action, and in rebuttal to the Dedham Public Library paragraph quoted immediately above, the Library Director said:

> Rather than being less people-oriented with the introduction of fines, I believe we have become more people-oriented by permitting more users to gain better access to more books. We simply aimed our new policy at those who were inconsiderate of fellow library users. The Pennsylvania State Library closed the Pandora's box of overdues successfully, and I would advise other libraries to think long and hard before adopting a no-fine policy. (Ref. 39)

Two additional negative evaluations are provided by libraries which conducted brief and unhappy experiments in eliminating fines:

Morrisson-Reeves Public Library, Richmond, Indiana, which began a six-month experiment without fines but dropped it after 3½ months:

> If you've been considering the noble experiment of starting a "no-fine" system, don't do it! ... The experiment has accomplished none of the hoped-for goals. ... After the program was in effect only two weeks we began to see the disenchanting facts. ... In general we will go back to the image of rules, law and order, even to prosecution, if this becomes necessary. (Ref. 15)

Virginia Beach Public Library, after an unsuccessful two-month experiment without fines:

> We rapidly discovered the invalidity of some of our most cherished beliefs. ... Our experiment ended not with a bang but with a whimper. ... Whereas our no-fine attempt was a failure, we feel we have derived much benefit from it. ... We still believe that a free public library should be free. We still continue to work with the problem of fines. We shall still attempt experiments to improve the fine situation. (Ref. 9)

In reviewing the above summary evaluations of those who have experienced fine-free operations, it is seen that the consensus of reporting libraries is in agreement with

the experience of the Alameda County Library that the advantages resulting from a no-fines policy far outweigh the disadvantages. The purposes of having fines, as discussed in Section III.A., have been rebutted in theory (Section III.B.) and in practice (Section III.C.). Furthermore, as shown in Section III.D., there is really no feasible prospect of reinstating the former system of fines in the Alameda County Library System.

The inescapable conclusion is that the decision of the Board of Supervisors to permit the library to institute a fine-free operation two years ago was a wise one.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. The Central Overdues Unit.

The Alameda County Library System should continue to strengthen its centralized operation of overdues procedures, because of its benefits for operational efficiency, budgetary economies, collection development, and improved public service.

In particular, the plans for improving the staffing, equipment, mechanization, organizational relationship, and location of the Central Overdues Unit (see Section II.E.) should receive top-level administrative support, and should be implemented at the earliest feasible time.

B. The Abolition of Fines for Overdue Materials.

The two-year experience of the Alameda County Library System without fines for overdue materials has been successful, in agreement with most of the other public libraries that have tried it. The benefits that were hoped for have been realized in practice.

Therefore, the experimental character of the present no-fines policy arrangement should be replaced by a formal statement that would make it the permanent policy of the Alameda County Library System to operate without fines for overdue materials.

C. General Remarks.

The Alameda County government should congratulate itself that it has a library staff that is willing and capable of instituting innovations in its operations that result in better administration and improved services for the benefit of the citizens of the County. The staff is outstanding, and should receive continuing support and recognition from County government in appreciation of its excellence.

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